

# Shakespeare Sermons



Edited by  
George Arbuthnot,  
Vicar of Stratford-on-Avon

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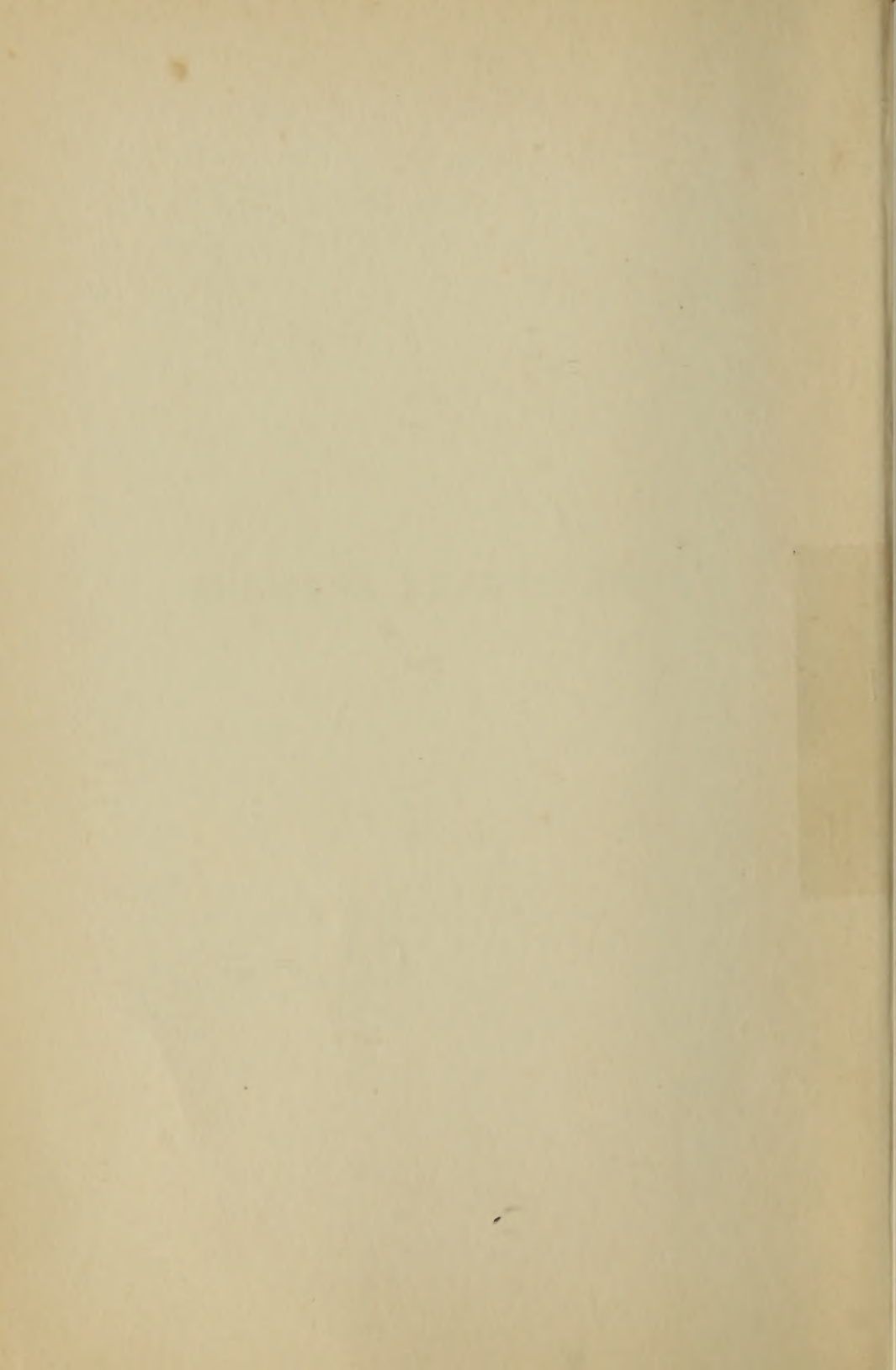
Geoffrey R. Wyan Griffith  
in remembrance of  
St. George's Days at  
Shatford-on-Avon.


M. E. A.  
1903.



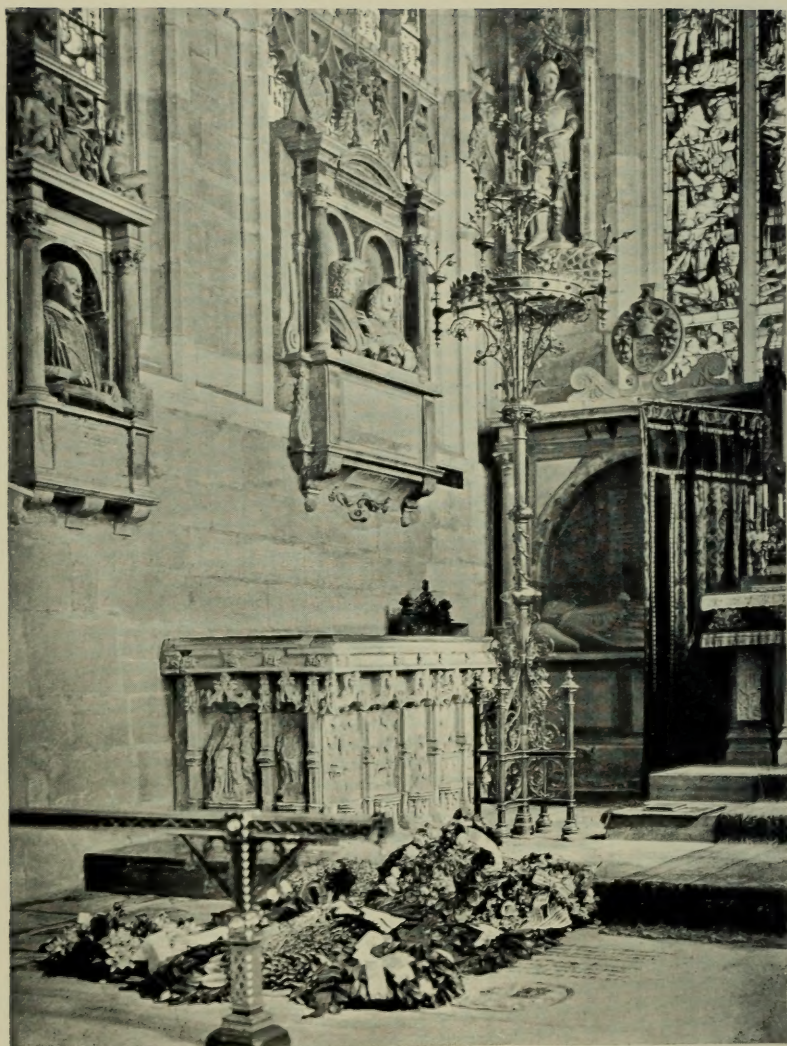
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SHAKESPEARE SERMONS





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THE POET'S GRAVE.

*(On his birthday.)*

# SHAKESPEARE SERMONS

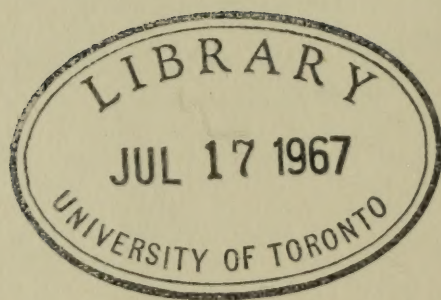
*PREACHED IN THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH  
OF STRATFORD-ON-AVON*

EDITED BY THE  
REV. GEORGE ARBUTHNOT  
VICAR OF STRATFORD-ON-AVON

LONGMANS, GREEN, AND CO.  
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1900

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## P R E F A C E

IT has become an established custom in Stratford-on-Avon to commemorate the birthday of her immortal son by a series of performances in the Memorial Theatre. These bring together large numbers of persons from all parts of the kingdom, and from beyond seas ; and for several years it has been my practice to invite eminent preachers to address them on Sunday from the "Shakespeare pulpit." The sermons thus preached have earned the name of Shakespeare Sermons. I have been able to collect many of them, and now present them to the public by the kind permission of those who composed and delivered them. I have no doubt they will be read with interest, not only by many who heard them, but by that far larger

number to whom the name of our great poet will act as an attraction. I have further ventured to add to the bulk of the volume thus formed two sermons of my own, preached at the Evening Service on the same days.

GEORGE ARBUTHNOT.

*November, 1900.*

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I.

*April 23, 1893.*

THE USE OF WORKS OF FICTION.

BY THE RIGHT REV. G. F. BROWNE, BISHOP OF BRISTOL.

“But it was even thou, my companion, my guide, and mine own familiar friend.”—Ps. lv. 14.

THE Psalmist is seeking his wonted solace under circumstances of unusually severe trial. Whatever trouble oppressed him, his practice was to pour it forth before God. In strong and graphic words he put the matter at its worst ; and looking at it so, the conviction that God was greater than they that were against him, that God's mercy followed him always, brought consolation. However gloomy the recital of his sufferings and his dangers might be, however hopeless his position might seem, there always came in the end the sense that the Almighty hand would rescue him, that he was safe under the protection of the

everlasting arms. There always came the blessed relief of trust in God's purposes, yea, though God should smite him. It is probably this, more than any other feature in the Psalms, speaking with the same voice through manifold authorship, which has given them the hold they have upon the minds of men. There is nothing else in the literature of the world, religious or secular, which fills anything like the place this great collection of Hebrew poetry fills to men who are in sorrow or distress. And it is additionally remarkable that, under the very opposite conditions, when man's heart is full of thankful happiness, he finds in the Psalms its highest means of expression.

The occasion of the fifty-fifth Psalm was one of unusual trial. Enemies the Psalmist had, open and avowed, powerful and unscrupulous. Against such enemies he knew how to demean himself. But now, it was not an open enemy that had set himself against him, but one whom he had trusted; one who had sweetened counsel to him; one who knew his inmost thoughts; to whom he had given himself without reserve. This familiar friend now stood revealed as a treacherous insidious foe, working specially dangerous evil by the use of the

special opportunities which their close intimacy had given.

We cannot always choose our companions. Family circumstances, or the circumstances of our professional life, bring us into close relations with many persons whom we should not ourselves have selected for this purpose. Not unfrequently circumstances compel us to see much, day by day, of those whom we would rather not see at all; persons who are out of harmony with our nature. On the other hand, circumstances keep us apart from many of whom we fain would see more, who view things as we do ourselves, or whose divergences of view are themselves of a nature to attract and stimulate our better qualities. To many men and many women this compulsory presence of persons of whom we do not care to see much, this compulsory absence of persons whose society has charms for us,—this presence and this absence form a serious and standing trial.

It is perhaps as well that we should not have complete power and freedom of choice in selecting our companions. There is breadth, there is education, in the fact that we have to associate with certain people whether we like it or not, and have

to make the best of it. We have too much tendency towards one-sidedness as it is, and we should develop this tendency still further if we could choose our companions entirely in accordance with our personal tastes—develop it to the detriment of our own nature, and of our power for usefulness in the world. For it is not a one-sided man, who, in these days of independent thought and independent action, can bring into combination the forces needed for useful work on an important scale. But it is a very different thing when we come to choosing an intimate companion, a friend ; one to whom we open on sufficient occasion the inner self ; to whom we are willing to give the opportunity of saying a word that may influence us, at times when some grave and serious resolve is forming itself into shape and substance, in our mind and our conscience. A friend who can be with us in our less-guarded moments must be a friend indeed ; one who will say the right word—not the wrong—at a critical time ; will put into our mind, when the mind lies open to such influence, good desires. We may not be able to find such a friend—such friends are rare. But at least we need not admit to a position of this intimacy any

one who falls short of our ideal. Better far have no intimate friend than have one who is not certain to take the side of our better self, when the other self is striving for the mastery.

Some of the most subtle and powerful influences which other persons exercise upon us are independent of personal contact. The persons themselves are very often unconscious that they are exercising influence upon us. We are even unconscious of it ourselves at times. The more subtle the influence is, the more powerful ; and the more subtle, the less seen. The most subtle influence, to many temperaments, is that of books. When you choose a book, and shut yourself up with it, and give yourself over to its fascination ; and allow its pathos to touch your heart, its suggestions to move your feelings, it may be your passions, for good or for evil, its arguments to influence your mind ;—you have made it for the time your companion, your guide, your own familiar friend. You may take it or reject it in the first instance. It is not forced upon you by circumstances. You choose it for yourself. And having chosen it, you can dismiss it again if you feel out of harmony with it. But if you go on

with it, and really read it—read it with the mind, and not merely with the eye—that is the relation which it does in fact hold with respect to you ; it is for the time your companion, your guide, your own familiar friend.

First, of the writer, the man or the woman who sits down to construct an intimate companion for fellow men and women, for hundreds and thousands of persons whom the writer will never know, will never see ; to introduce to many an innocent mind a stranger, who will be at once admitted to the closest intimacy, to direct influence, in the most unguarded moments ; to teach some fair young girl as she reads by her bedroom fire ; to put thoughts into the heart of a young man making his resolves for life. The responsibility is nothing short of tremendous. There is a crime which has always roused the horror of mankind, even when resorted to under the pressure of internecine warfare, the crime known as poisoning the wells. This crime some authors of works of fiction commit ; not under the pressure of savage warfare, but sitting quietly at home among comfortable surroundings ; not for wrath's sake, not for revenge, but for money. Among the most treacherous

enemies of purity are books. You take up a book which seems innocent enough, and suddenly you find that the author or authoress is leading you into the contemplation of the vivisection of an impure passion, of the abnormal development of some lower part of man's nature. All men and women should lay down a book the moment they become aware of this villainy on the part of the author or authoress. Some of the books we see in people's hands now are altogether bad—bad from the first page, bad from the moment their author or authoress is named. They are widely read by those with whom we ordinarily associate, by our own relations ; we have read some of them ourselves. Such books should not be allowed to live. Let the masters and mistresses of households have the courage to send their compliments to the circulating library, and request that the books sent for the future may be what is called decent, and we shall have fewer of these abominable productions. Authors and authoresses prostitute their powers for gold ; cut off the gold, and you will stop the prostitution. There are healthy and there are unhealthy ways of treating that, round which so many tragedies have centred ; but in

the modern novel you run a great risk of finding it treated either alluringly or in a morbid and sentimental manner. There is a beautiful *prayer for blessing books* in our earliest Anglo-Saxon Pontifical, as used by a royal prelate in the northern kingdom 1150 years ago, which makes one wish that the same solemn view could be taken by the men and women who sit down to write books now: "Let the power of Thy Holy Spirit descend upon this book, cleanse, purify, bless, and hallow it."

The author of a book which he or she intends as a companion for men and women in times of relaxation; in times of quiet thought; in times when the reader is alone and in private, with mind open and feelings free from the guards and fences we put up in society;—the author undertakes a very grave responsibility, and ought to have a definite intention and purpose in the work. But so far as the reader is concerned, the impression produced by the book would appear to be in considerable part independent of the purpose of the author. If you carefully compare the reviews of a novel, say in two of the weekly papers which devote themselves to such work, you see what

very different views can be expressed of one and the same book. You find the divergence in some cases almost as marked as this : the one reviewer says, "A bright, good book,"—the other, "Characterized by its author's worst faults ;" or this—the one, "The author is clearly a man of one book, and he wrote that years ago,"—the other, "Of all the excellent books he has written, this is the best." And in conversation we constantly find, almost to our surprise, even after experience, what a different estimate from ours, others have formed of books which we have read and appraised. There is more in this than the mere difference of opinion which exists on every conceivable question. It means that each man's and each woman's nature assimilates that part of the character of a book which is akin to it, rejects—it may be unconsciously, it may be in active dislike—that part which is out of harmony with it. That is to say, we enter into a book, and the book enters into us. Parts of it take possession of us. We have selected it at will, and we read it as we please ; we act as if we were dominant, and it a mere minister to our pleasure, or our need of rest, or our desire for amusement. But the captive enslaves the conqueror, if the

reader is not repelled. After they have met and communed, the reader is not quite what he was before. The influence may not be great, it may not be in any sense permanent, but it is there.

And I think it ought to be there. If we are to ask ourselves seriously what we regard as the use of works of fiction, we can certainly not answer, "To pass away idle time," "To amuse, to be read and forgotten." With more propriety we might answer, "To rest the mind," "To save the wear and tear of dwelling upon our trials and our worries." But those answers would be incomplete, and we should see that they were incomplete, if we asked ourselves, with regard to any particular book, Has it done no more than that?—only rested me, only staved off worries? In other words, each book we read should produce an influence upon us; and if we have really read it, we ought to be able to analyze and understand that influence.

To use a work of fiction rightly, we should ask, when it is finished, not so much "What is my opinion of the book?" as "How has it impressed me?" That is, we should make it rather a matter of feeling than of intellect. I do not doubt that some—it may be many—of you think otherwise;

and I have a complete respect for that other opinion. You may say that all reading should be an intellectual process, and should be consciously so treated. There may be intellectual processes enough in reading an interesting novel ; there may be—and I think may easily be—too much of intellectual process. For the great mass of mankind, I should prefer to regard the use of works of fiction as serving the moral rather than the intellectual part of our nature. There are, in fact, some few striking exceptions in modern—recent—times, but it is on the whole well that they are few. An attempt to do two different things at the same time is not often successful. The one or the other suffers loss.

Still less do I think it a desirable use of fiction to press philosophical speculations. You feel continually, in reading a book of this kind, that the writer is playing the other side as well as his own on the chess-board, and playing it ill. At certain points in the dialogue you feel a desire to intervene. It is an interesting process to think out what the other side in the dialogue would have said if the orthodox side had made a rather more powerful rejoinder at a crisis in the argument. You feel, too, that the writer is a little inclined

to act as court painter to the characters who maintain his view—as caricaturist to the opposition. Your feelings are meant to be enlisted in favour of the personal characteristics, or the personal fate, of him or of her who is the exponent of the author's views. A sense of unfairness comes upon you at times. I would much rather have an argument in philosophy, or in religious belief or disbelief, presented in the abstract, where it stands or falls on its own intrinsic merits or demerits, which alone should decide the result, than have it intentionally mixed up with the imaginary sorrows, the imaginary nobleness, of the characters created to maintain it.

And so I come to what you may call, if you will, a narrow view, that the true function of works of fiction is to influence our moral nature, not our intellect ; to develop our feelings, rather than our mind ; to guide our impulses, not to teach us to think ; to form character, not to sharpen the faculties. And this is not to take a low view of the function of works of fiction. On the contrary, from my point of view it is to assign to them a very high place indeed. It is to give to them a very large sphere of usefulness. It is to credit them with influence over far the greatest part of

the action of ordinary men and women. How very few of us are thinking machines, acting consciously in accordance with the results of calculating thought! What a vast majority of us act from feeling, from impulse—in the better or in the less worthy sense of the word! And surely that which affects the springs of action of the great mass of mankind is playing a very large part in the government of the world; and to credit it with that is not to assign to it a low place.

It is true that we have a good many proverbs which express the view that it would be well if people acted more upon thought, and less upon impulse, than they do. Those proverbs are right which suggest caution; but to act with caution is not inconsistent with acting from impulse, in the better sense of the word. Some of the very best people we know—best in every good and noble sense—act by impulse, not by thought. There is no need whatever for impulse to mean anything headstrong, inconsiderate, rash. I am using it as a term of high praise. We are told that second thoughts are best, and so no doubt they very often are; but where are we supposed to begin?—with the first thought, or before it? Where you

have in a man or a woman that most excellent gift, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, the most subtle and powerful weapon for the remedy of our social troubles, the blessed gift of sympathy,—where you have this developed, the impulse of that man or woman is worth more than long trains of thought. So when you say that second thoughts are best, you must be clear what you mean by first thought. A call for action comes upon you suddenly. Instinct, impulse, tells you how to respond to the call. Then thought comes, and suggests doubts, difficulties, hesitations ; suggests perhaps some other course, which would avoid some of these difficulties—a safer, if a less generous course. And then there comes second thought. I should think it is the fact with very many men of experience, who have gone through life with their eyes open, and have taken note of springs of action and of consequences of action ; I should think it is the experience of very many, that second thought reverts to original instinct or impulse, and that second thought is best. I have heard a man of experience of the world say, after many lessons of inadequate success, when in an open-minded manner he has taken a view which was not his own

view of the best way to deal with a demand for action, "For the rest of my life I shall back my instinct."

But if that is to be so, our instinct or impulse must be of no rash, untrained character. You can train your instinct at least as carefully and successfully as you can train your thought ; and a trained instinct is to most of us better than calculation. How—otherwise than by long experience—are we to train our instinct, so that it may become to us a guide in our way through life, a practical guide through real difficulties, a guide that may tell us how to face circumstances we have never experienced before ?

I should answer first, not professionally, but as a simple fact, that so far as principle goes there never has been in the world anything to compare with the Christian code as a training to the instinct. And if I were asked what is the best practical handmaid to that code, not as a matter of religious opinion or belief, but as a guide to a working instinct, I should answer that I know nothing better than a clean, sweet, healthy novel or drama, where the people are parables rather than portraits ; are not impossible people, but the better

kind of everyday people ; bright with the charms which in real life lie dormant in so many ; men and women moving through the pages, with whom women and men as they read can honestly and wholly fall in love. If only those who have the power would make to this generation the priceless present of books and dramas that are not indeed a picture of a Paradise before the Fall, but are not pictures of a hopelessly fallen world, where man is cruel and brutal, and the sufferings of woman are awful ! If only such writers would give us wholesome books, where sin and sorrow are not absent, but are in the shade, and brightness and sympathy and love are the forces that guide the instincts upwards, and teach us to hope for, and show us how to labour for, the happiness, the regeneration of a fallen world ! Do any of you know that bitter cry of a girl in humble life to her mother, which some of us read a year ago, "Why didn't you warn me ? Other girls know what to guard against, because they read novels. I never had that chance, and you did not help me." Yes, indeed, one is tempted to exclaim to that author, "You rightly estimate the influence of works of fiction, as you show by this reference to one of

their many effects. Why, then, do you not yourself use your own powers to show us how the world may be made fair, and how fair the world may be made, instead of wringing our hearts with the icy chill of such a picture—such a hopeless, weary picture—as you have drawn ? ”

It is, in fact, the great use of works of fiction that they give to those who from the nature of the case are inexperienced, something of experience. We, all of us, have our own problem to solve, on one occasion and another, and we solve it on each occasion in some one way, with no recall, no second trial ; we get our own experience on the further side of the need for action, that is, when it is too late to guide our action for that occasion. It is well for all that they should have the advantage of vicarious experience ; that they should have favourite characters in healthy literature, into whose trials, sorrows, joys, they have entered ; whose experiences have been so realized by them that they serve as an instinctive guide. The one argument against this is, that if the book is in any useful sense a picture of what is in the world, if it is to be of the nature of a warning guide, it must present to the imagination things of which there

need in some cases never be knowledge. This is the critical point at which the worthy and the unworthy writer of works of fiction part company. The worthy writer has carefully studied the question, Is ignorance innocence? and the question beyond that, Is knowledge a defilement? and beyond that again the question, How to convey knowledge so as not to spoil innocence? And those questions having been studied with a faithful and pure heart, the scene is drawn with a firm and tactful hand. As for the unworthy writer, if you have got so far in his book as this, it is high time to throw him away.

And it is not the experience only, but the character, of our favourites in literature, which is and should be impressed upon us. The boy and the girl could not do better than have a hero and a heroine, on whom to mould such part of their character as may be moulded. We have all, I hope, gone through it; and those who have gone through it are not, I hope, inclined to deter those whose turn has yet to come. This hero and heroine many have to seek in imaginary characters, that is, in a novel or a drama. Given that the imaginary character is drawn by a sympathetic hand,

there are advantages in the fact that the hero or the heroine is imaginary. The author or authoress who has drawn a really lovable character, and has given it to the world to be a mould on which those who are as wax in the hands of a skilful writer may form their own character, has done a blessed deed, the happy consequences of which tell on the side of good in this world, and will not have ceased to tell even when the other world is reached.

We all of us know the power of Shakespeare's characters in our own thoughts. We know the noble men, the lovable women; we know the ignoble, the hateful. He does not describe them to us, he makes them speak. We hear them; we see them; we know them; we feel their influence. The dramatic form gives added force to the intrinsic power. To be something like this one, to bear no resemblance to that, is an aim worthy of any man, of any woman. And the secret of his power to touch us and guide us thus is mainly this, that his creations are true to nature. Some of them are too openly true to nature for a state of society in which words are held to be shocking, while the actions corresponding to the words are done in secret. He lived in an outspoken age,

and he spoke out. The coarser parts of his writings we can avoid. There is abundance left to teach us nobly and delicately what we are, and what we may become. And at worst no one can ever find in Shakespeare's plays an allurement to sin.

You have in this church of his, two empty niches, one on either side of the altar. Whether they were ever occupied by statues, there is nothing left to show. Why should you not fill them? If you ever do fill them, fill them as Shakespeare would have filled them, by figures that shall speak for ever, to men and to women, of the type of noble manhood and womanhood. Who can doubt that Shakespeare would have had the men of his time set up the figure of St. George for merry England, the traditional saint on whose day he died, on whose day we hold this service? Who that knows the history of English dedications and English saints' days, can doubt that in the other niche St. Margaret would have appeared? Your chancel would indeed be rich if you added to the world-known bust of your own Shakespeare the figures of St. George and St. Margaret. They would speak as his drama speaks, for in it he throws us back

upon nature lovingly and hopefully. He opens our eyes to the fair and pure and deep things within the compass of our nature ; and their story tells of what we are capable, in our natural capacity as men and as women, strengthened and sweetened by the knowledge of Him in whom we trust.<sup>1</sup>

It would be easy to use inflated language, on an occasion so remarkable as this commemoration, in his own home, in his own church, in presence of his ashes, of one who reigns supreme in the world of European language. But this we may say in quietness and confidence, speaking to those who know and love him so well, that so long as the world shall love to think of all things pure and fair, so long will this day be kept here as we now keep it, with rejoicing for the treasure-house full of treasures which he has bequeathed to us, with thankfulness to Almighty God for this His so great gift.

<sup>1</sup> The niches were filled, as here suggested, in the following year by the efforts of a committee of ladies in Stratford-on-Avon.

## II.

*April 22, 1894.*

### SHAKESPEARE, THE PROPHET.

BY THE REV. R. S. DE C. LAFFAN, M.A.

“He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward.”—ST. MATT. x. 41.

THE reproach has been addressed to us English-speaking people that we do not know what to do with our highest literature, and especially with our poetic literature: that we do not take it seriously enough. I fear that, in a very large measure at least, the reproach is true. To most of us, I suppose, the poets and the imaginative writers generally, are persons whom we are willing enough to call upon to amuse us in our hours of mirth, to soothe us, it may be, in our hours of grief and suffering, to tickle our ears with concord of sweet sounds, and our imaginations with counterfeit presentments of the rarer joys and more passionate pains of life; but after all they are dreamy unpractical people, who are well enough

to pass an idle hour with, but to whom we should never think of going for guidance in matters of vital import, or for deep insight into the real problems of life. And yet, if use and wont had not sealed our eyes that they cannot see, and closed our ears so that they cannot hear, the highest literature we know, the literature of the Bible, might remind us that in God's guidance of the history of Israel, it was not so: that there, at least, the man of passionate rhythmic utterance, which is the essential form and body of poetry, was also—was necessarily—the man of intensity of feeling and intensity of insight, which are poetry's substance and essential soul: that, in a word, the poet and the prophet are one, not indeed in the secondary and, I may almost say, accidental sense in which the prophet is the foreteller of things to be, but in the primary and essential sense in which he is the forth-teller of the hidden truth of things as they are. Read through the utterances of any of the great prophets that arose in Israel, and you will see that their first characteristic is veracity of insight and veracity of utterance: that the first gift which they bring to their nation is the power to see itself as it is: and that the power of

foresight and the power of deliverance, are not something added to this from without, but something which has its origin in this, and grows out of it as surely as a tree grows up from its roots.

Now, the history of Israel is not something apart in the history of the world, it is not unique, it is typical. Just as a teacher of botany will dissect a single plant, and explain the correlation of all its parts to one another, and their relation to the great forces of earth and water and air from which it draws its life, not that his hearers may suppose this plant to be something unlike all others, but that in it they may learn the essential structure and organization which, with whatever infinite modifications, run through all plants; so in the same way God has written for us the history of His guidance of Israel, not that we may admire it as something peculiar to one people, but that we may look for, and learn to recognize the same guidance, in all history and among all nations. And what was true of God revealed in the Old Testament as Justice, is, and must be, tenfold true of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ as Love. For

“The hands  
That reach through Nature moulding men,”

are in very deed and truth the Hands of the Crowned Christ, the King of men, throned above the Heaven of Heavens, and moulding not Churches alone, but politics, and science, and literature, and art, and every human activity, and every aspiration of man, to fill each their due place in that great temple of God and of Humanity, which is the fulfilment through the ages of the promise of the Kingdom of Heaven. And because this is so, surely we should look in the great poetic utterances of our own English speech, for the same guidance, the same insight into the truth of things, which we have learnt to associate with the function of the poet and the prophet in Israel of old. Nor shall we look in vain. To us everyday men and women, life as we look at it, nature as we look at her with our own unaided eyes, offers only a confused mass of impressions, details, facts, unconnected with one another, and bound to one another by no great laws, by no great principles running through them. We cannot see the wood for the trees. But go to the man of insight ; the man who has given years to the study of nature. Put yourself in his hands and ask him to teach you : and he will so arrange the facts for you, so lead you on

from observation to observation, from experiment to experiment, from conclusion to conclusion, that at last you will begin to see the facts falling into place, the outlines of the great laws growing clearer and clearer before your eyes, and the majestic order of the universe emerging for you out of the seeming chaos of impressions, not because you have been told what to see, but because things have been so arranged for you, that you cannot help seeing if you will. In the great Natural History Museum at Kensington, which is one of the glories of England, there is a series of cases in which are exhibited the skeletons of the various congeners of the horse: and by the mere arrangement and order of these, the different stages of evolution are so exhibited and visibly set forth, that the dullest mind and the least observant eye sees almost at once what it has taken innumerable learned men years upon years of patient labour to discover.

Now, what the man of scientific insight does for the facts of the material world, just *that* the great artist, the great painter, the great sculptor, the great imaginative writer, most of all the great poet, does for the facts of the moral and spiritual

world. Out of the confused mass of impressions he eliminates the irrelevant ; he selects, he orders, he arranges ; he brings one fact into the foreground and floods it with strong light, another he throws back upon the canvas into the shadow ; he disentangles, as it were, from the mass of detail that oppresses us, the great structural lines : and so, not thrusting his insight upon us from without, but letting us share it from within, gives us, in the measure of our ability to receive it, his own power of seeing the meaning, and the order, and the inner truth of life, makes us too able "to see life steadily and see it whole," to grasp it not only in the truth of its detail, but in the wider truth of the bearing on one another of all its parts.

For this reason every true artist and poet is, in his measure, a seer, and every supreme artist and poet is, in his measure, a prophet. He tells forth with convincing power that which he himself has seen.

It is in this sense that I do not hesitate to claim for Shakespeare that he is supremely the prophet, the forth-teller of human nature, and of human life.

In the play which forms the central point of this year's celebration, the *Second Part of*

*Henry IV.*, two characters stand out prominently on the canvas—the character of Falstaff, and the character of Prince Hal. Not much that is prophetic, you may say, in Shakespeare's treatment of one of them at least. But look closer at the picture. In the first place there is—is there not?—the unflinching veracity of statement which we demand of the prophet, the facing of the facts of life as they are, not as we should like them to be. Shakespeare does not tell you, as we preachers are too apt to do, that vice and wantonness, debauchery and drunkenness are not pleasant, have no attractions, do not appeal to anything in human nature. On the contrary, you shall have the riot, and the mirth, and the intoxication of them set before you in the scene of the Boar's Head Tavern, and elsewhere ; you shall feel for and with Falstaff in it all ; you shall understand and sympathize with the attraction which draws even a noble spirit like the Prince's out of its true orbit for a time ; you shall face the full significance of the obvious facts as they lie on the surface of life for any man to see that will. But with these facts, and in union with them, you shall see, too, the facts which do not

lie on the immediate surface. You shall watch the mean evasions and petty tricks which are the outcome of this life. You shall watch the shifty old man as he tries to slip out of the sight of the Chief Justice; you shall stand by and hear his pitiful attempts to seem at his ease, to carry off the matter as a jest, while all the while he writhes inwardly before the stedfast gaze of those calm grave eyes. You shall see the gradual eating up of all the better qualities in the nature that yields to such a life. You shall see the soldier stoop to

“Wring  
From the hard hands of peasants their vile trash  
By indirection,”

while by the same act he cheats of his levies the King whose commission he bears. You shall see and feel the scorn which real warriors feel for him on the field of battle. And side by side with the sympathy, there shall grow up in you the loathing and the contempt for the life that brings these things upon a man. Then you shall learn, in his own comment on the boasting of Shallow, to what despised old age a life so spent must tend. And last of all you shall stand by

him in the terrible moment—for under the comedy of it there does lie tragedy deep and terrible—when the new King, his own royal Hal, thrusts him aside with the words of doom—

“I know thee not, old man : fall to thy prayers ;  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester !  
I have long dream’d of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swell’d, so old and so profane,  
But, being awake, I do despise my dream ;”

and, as he goes out into rejection and contempt, you shall understand the end of these men.

In Prince Hal, again, you shall learn another truth that does not lie on the surface of things. In the impulse of a noble nature, when the call of duty comes, bravely to fling aside these trappings of vice and riot, you shall realize how essentially antagonistic are the nobleness and the degradation, how impossible that they should exist together, even if for a time they seem to be conjoined. It has been sometimes feared by some good but over timorous souls, who think they have abolished the evil in the world when they have shut their eyes to it, that Shakespeare’s Falstaff scenes may have a bad effect on the young men who witness them on the stage. To me they rather seem to cry with the trumpet voice of our English Harry

to every young man who is tempted to linger in the murky valleys of sensuous indulgence—"Awake! awake! awake! despise thy dream!" And to all of us who in any measure have the care and charge of young lives, they cry with such true prophetic utterance that we dare not shut our eyes to their temptations, and cry "Peace" when there is no peace, but must see to it that we plant in them betimes that seed of noble purpose and noble selfless service, by which alone the weeds of evil can be choked and strangled that they die.

I would fain go on to point out how the same veracity of outward fact, combined with the same veracity of inward law, runs through the other plays of the week; but I must be brief. I will only, therefore, ask you to consider how the truly terrible, awe-inspiring scene in *Richard III.* is not the death, but the tent scene, when his own conscience calls before him the vision of his crimes, when for a brief space the curtain of a soul is lifted, and we shrink in horror from the vision of that inward hell, which every doer of evil carries within his breast, and the fire of whose torment no outward thing can avail to quench or to allay.

Set that side by side with the same power of

inward remorse which, in *As You Like It*, drives the usurping duke to descend from his throne even in the plenitude of his power, and which haunts the spirit and disturbs the rest of Henry IV., outwardly successful though he is even to the end; and then say whether, in his delineation of human nature, Shakespeare is not essentially a prophet of righteousness, and a prophet of righteousness the more convincing, the more irresistible, because he is so manifestly clear from any preconceived theory which the facts must be made to fit; because, with veracity so limpid and so transparent, he gives you the truth as it has come to him from his own observation of human life and human character, and makes you able to see it for yourself; because, according to that fine saying of Steele, that "in a mind truly virtuous, the scorn of vice is always accompanied with the pity of it," he never allows us to lose altogether, even in the worst of his characters, that touch of human gentleness and pity which reminds us, that even the lowest and the most erring is after all a member with us of the brotherhood of humanity.

If, then, you would have the prophet's reward—the reward of insight into human nature and human

life—that insight which it, above all, imports you to have, because human nature, your nature and mine, is the instrument, and human life is the material, with which and out of which you and I are to help to fashion the Kingdom of God on earth:—if you would know yourself and the world—receive the poet in the name of—that is, as being in very deed and truth—a prophet; and through the joy, and the laughter, and the mirth of this week of delight in his fair and free creations, keep your ears open to those deeper notes which will furnish food for days of after meditation.

But there is one other aspect of the prophet on which I must briefly touch. The prophet of Israel was, in almost every case, the centre and rallying point of national feeling, of Jewish patriotism. That, too, Shakespeare ought to be to us; that, this Stratford celebration ought to be, year by year, helping to make him more and more.

This celebration ought to grow into the great national festival of the English-speaking peoples, transcending all differences of politics, of creed, and even of race; for in the man who was born in this ancient border-land, between the Teuton and the Celt, the Teutonic and the Celtic elements

minge and blend in perfect harmony, and Celt and Teuton, the two great races of our Empire, can alike claim their heritage in him. In a day when the disintegrating, the centrifugal forces, have so much power, it is well that we strengthen by all means in our power the centripetal forces, the forces that unite us. Now, what unites us, is our common past, the heritage of our common fathers, the life that was ours before separation of place or polity came to mar our unity. That life, that past, is not dead, it lives still in the works of our great poet, preserved alive through the centuries by the magic spell of genius; and if sometimes it seems to sleep, it is but with the sleep of the Enchanted Beauty and her court, ready for whoso brings with him the touch of imaginative sympathy to set it thrilling with a kiss.

Forgive me if I say that we in Stratford are hardly doing all we might to make this festival all that it should be, and shall yet be. A year ago I was in Frankfurt on Goethe's birthday, and I was deeply touched to see how all day long a stream of people poured into the Goethe House, man and woman, rich and poor, old and young, every one of them bringing some offering of flowers

to deck the birthplace of Frankfurt's greatest son. Something like that I would fain see in Stratford on Shakespeare's day. I would see the Birthplace and the Tomb rich with offerings of flowers. I would see the town gay with banners by day, and brightly illuminated by night, as for some royal pageant; for, indeed, the royalty of genius transcends all other royalty. I would fain feel that all our energies were taxed to the utmost to make this celebration worthy of the prophet poet, for whom we thank God to-day, to draw to our national festival pilgrims from every portion of the world, to bring our week of representations nearer and nearer to the ideal of what a rendering of Shakespeare should be. In working thus we shall be working, not for Stratford alone, but for England, and for that Greater England which stretches wherever men of English blood are stirred by the great master-words of English speech; we shall be working in Shakespeare's spirit to keep alive that flame of patriotic love for England which glows through all his works, and which must be tempered, not quenched, by whatever of love and reverence we have learnt to bear to other races and to other lands. For, after all, it is not in common interests

of pocket and of pelf, but in a common sentiment, in the glory of a common past, in the common possession of great memories and great men, that we shall find the true bond to bind together the English-speaking race throughout the world with the threefold cord of love, which no power on earth shall avail to break.

### III.

*April 26, 1896.*

#### A POET'S RESPONSIBILITY.

BY THE REV. CANON AINGER, MASTER OF THE TEMPLE.

“And Balaam said unto Balak, Lo, I am come unto thee : have I now any power at all to say anything ? the word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak.”—NUMB. xxii. 38.

ONCE more there comes round, in the services of our Church, the old familiar and fascinating story of the Prophet Balaam ; so fascinating, just because of its difficulties and its remoteness from modern ways and ideas. It were impertinent to tell the story over again in this place ; you all know it, and the lessons which many of the finest, most original intellects have found in it. This story of the man to whom God had revealed one mighty truth concerning His chosen people, who was in the end constrained by the Divine leading to confess that truth, and yet halted and struggled against that compulsion, and finally made shipwreck of his great gifts and of his life.

Balaam was a genius—a prophet and a poet ; and as with all such in the dark uncivilized ages of the world, had acquired the reputation of a wizard and a sorcerer. He was believed to have the power of making or marring the fortunes of other men or other nations. “We know whom thou blessest is blessed ; and whom thou cursest is cursed.” And he had made a profession of his prophetic insight. He was a pagan—outside of the fold which God in His great purposes was training for the world’s welfare ; but he had a knowledge of God, and of the supremacy of Righteousness as the one path to prosperity and blessedness. He knew that only in serving a God of holiness was there prosperity for a nation. But he loved popularity and he loved gain, and thus was torn asunder by conflicting forces. His conscience called him one way—his earthly interests, another. Unstable, because he could not make up his mind to forsake either, he shared the fate of all who “palter with Eternal God” for power, or popularity, or profit. It is true that God in the end overruled the prophet’s utterance, but this did not save the man himself from ruin. For though truth was vindicated, the sin remained. He was

one of those who would not "play false," and yet would "wrongly win." And thus the nobler capabilities of the man were neutralized by union with the baser; and the end was the gradual demoralization of his character. "Corruptio optimi pessima;" and his ultimate fate was just the direst which can befall a man—to tempt others to wholesale transgression, and to die impenitent.

My brethren, I have said that the very strangeness of the story, the very repulsiveness of it, makes its fascination. All its circumstances are so obsolete, and even repellent, and yet they come home in a hundred ways to our conscience. As some great critic, referring to a like fascination in Shakespeare's most famous creation, explained it by saying that it is because *our* life is lived again in it—"It is *we* who are Hamlet,"—so, I am convinced, in the example before us, we may say with truth, "It is *we* who are Balaam." And the sentence I have chosen from the narrative may serve to bring this home to us. "The word that God putteth in my mouth, that must I speak." For the saying must startle us by the universality of its application. The obligation, the responsibility, resting upon each one of us, to be true,

alike in heart and in speech, to whatever truths God has allowed us to learn. We know, only too well, how in this supreme and transcendent duty we have all failed in our past lives, and habitually fail. "Language was given us," so said the cynical philosopher, "to conceal our thoughts." And if this be an abuse or corruption of a Divine gift, what shall we say of language when treated as an instrument of concealing our better selves, our Divinely imparted conscience of the Right? And yet, how often are we not found halting, like Balaam, between two opinions; acting in his spirit, although exactly reversing his methods—cursing our surroundings, though we are called to bless them; knowing the right, and yet prostituting our gifts to lower purposes—to purposes that bring the world's "rewards of divination," which are popularity and gain; selling the Divine part of us to the world, for the world's rewards! For we all naturally desire the good things that the world can give. The world's smile is worth something to all of us. It means so many pleasant things—money, success, popularity, social amenities of all kinds—and that subtlest of all allurements, the convenience of swimming with the tide, and not

against it. And in so doing we have watched others, perhaps ourselves, lose the grasp of, and even the love of, our old ideals. We have followed the crowd ; done as the society about us does ; following examples, and never attempting to set them. We have gradually adopted the standards about us. We have fallen in with each successive change of habit, in the direction of greater laxity. We have become less scrupulous as to what books we read, what plays we see ; less heedful about our responsibilities for servants or dependents ; less careful about our weekly day of rest, and the weekly rest of those in our service. When the world—Balak—summons us to take up our parable, and disparage the children of light—(those living still under the discipline of God)—might we but have grace to cry with Balaam ; and the grace, which was *not* his, to amend our lives accordingly. “The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak !”

My brethren, I am not forgetting that this anniversary is a festival—a right and fitting festival—in your town, and I would not willingly fall into a tone that should be out of harmony with it. I would not (in the words of Florizel to

Perdita) "with these forced thoughts, darken the mirth of the feast." But I cannot think this leading Scripture of to-day, and the one of its many lessons I have drawn, irrelevant to the purpose of our holding festival in this church, which is to commemorate your own great poet and prophet, and to thank God for a gift so precious to this country and the whole English-speaking race. This is no time or place for outworn eulogy or for literary criticism. But the two great facts about Shakespeare that are admissible for our consideration on such an occasion are his marvellous and unique position as a thinker and a teacher concerning human life; and the extent to which his teachings are continuously alive in the world, just because they are not given in the forms of maxims and apophthegms, scattered desultorily over his pages, but are bound up with portraitures of flesh and blood, which the deep humanity of the poet has invested with perpetual life. It is thus that Shakespeare has impressed himself upon the memories and hearts of Englishmen in a way and degree to which, of course, there is no parallel in any other writer.

"The word that God putteth in my mouth,

that shall I speak." We know little, or nothing, of the mind and character of your great inhabitant, save from his works. "Others abide our question, thou art free," and we have to acquiesce in the undoubted fact. You know, my brethren, and with reason, all that is certainly to be known about his private life. That his friends loved him ; that he prospered in his calling ; that instead of the reckless and dissipated life of so many of his contemporary poets and dramatists, he worked hard and saved money, and provided for his old age and for his children ; and that while still in the fulness of life and faculties, he retired to spend his remaining years in the quiet of his native place. These are facts over which there is no disputing, and they tell us something—nay, I believe, they tell us *much*—as to the discipline under which he grew to be a prophet and a teacher to his kind. Do not mistake me for a moment. Do not imagine that I am upholding mere respectability (the fact that a man pays his way and that no one has anything particular to say against him) as a sign of God's grace working specially in His creature, or as implying any qualification to delight and instruct mankind. Neither do I assume that the

life of Shakespeare in London, separated from his home, and amid many debasing associations, was necessarily a flawless career—an ideal life. We have his own sad confession that touching pitch means defilement, and that “public manners” tend to lower the tone and dull the purer instincts of the soul. But I *do say* that a life lived, not from hand to mouth, but on a plan and method chosen and persevered in ; that hard work with a definite object before it ; that the self-denial necessary to such ends ; may foster in a man that sense of order and proportion and the harmony of things, which can never be attained in like degree by those who are constrained for the sheer necessities of the hour to consult, not their own conception of art and its dignity, but the tastes and fancies of the public for whom they cater. One may be sure that it is easier for a man to listen to the higher intuitions ; to “speak the word that God puts into the mouth ;” to feel his responsibility for law and order in the development of the genius which God has given him, when he is ordering his life on the kindred perception that life has its rules and methods and conditions of success, and that work and patience and self-denial

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are dominant among them. And when we turn from the art and work of Shakespeare to the art and work of many even of his more brilliant contemporaries and successors, it is just this distinction that we notice. Genius, you may object, is primarily the difference, and that in this respect there can be no comparison between Shakespeare and those contemporaries. And the difference cannot indeed be questioned. But quite distinct from what we vulgarly call the inspiration of the poet—his “eye in a fine frenzy rolling”—is this quality to which I have referred, the fundamental sense of moderation and proportion which we note in Shakespeare’s treatment of character and incident. What must strike us, unless familiarity has altogether blunted in us our perception, is his uniform abstinence from exaggeration in such treatment ; the absence of all love of horror for horror’s sake, or impurity for impurity’s sake. And this, remember, in an age when the craving for sensationalism was just as eager as it is to-day, and when nameless atrocities and so-called human characters, monstrous and abnormal, were continually chosen as the staple of dramatic interest, just because there was a public then, as now, that would have it so !

Some eighty years ago, a worthy and well-meaning philanthropist, of the name of Bowdler, brought out his edition of Shakespeare's plays, in which he had carefully excised every coarse and indelicate jest to be found in his dialogue ; and had the editor confined himself to doing this with judgment, he would have accomplished a laudable and useful task. For we wish Shakespeare to be in the hands of our women and children, and to be loved by them ; and the licence of one age differs largely from that of another. And the task, when accomplished, in fact redounded to Shakespeare's honour ; for it proved that, even under the sweeping scissors of Mr. Bowdler, the removal of such passages did not reduce the bulk of Shakespeare's work by a hundredth part, and in no way left the remainder injured or weakened in the process.

But unhappily, Mr. Bowdler cherished a rooted prejudice of a quite opposite complexion. He not only objected (and most rightly objected) to what was *contra bonos mores* in Shakespeare's dialogue, but he objected also to the presence there of what was *too* moral, *too* closely savouring of religion. That the Bible or any religious sentiment flowing therefrom should find a place in the pages of

a profane playwright, seemed to the editor a no less shocking circumstance. It seemed to him, for instance, intolerable that that really engaging character, once your near neighbour, Mr. Justice Shallow, should illustrate the shortness of human life by reference to the Psalmist: "As the Psalmist saith, all must die!" And Mr. Bowdler's pen went through the passage. But far worse than such excisions were those of any allusions scattered through the plays, often with consummate and magical effect, which could not have been found there but for Shakespeare's indebtedness, with all religious Englishmen, to the teaching of the Cross. When Othello, in that matchless scene just before the murder of Desdemona, a scene that it is difficult to think of without tears, exclaims—

"I must weep—  
But they are cruel tears: this sorrow's heavenly,  
*It strikes where it does love.*"

Out went the passage under Mr. Bowdler's hands. It was too near akin, we must suppose, to "Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth." And this sentiment was therefore judged unfit to be "read aloud in families!"

I make no apology, my brethren, for this

apparent digression, because it bears directly upon what I would enforce to-day, the change that has happily come over our better judgments as to the responsibilities of a writer. All those "frailties of the time" which our editor regarded as blots upon Shakespeare's text, seem to us as much blots as before. They are survivals from a more free-spoken or less refined age. But we have come tardily to recognize that it is not these things which make a writer moral, or immoral, but rather the tone and bias of his work as a whole ; his sense of the dignity of man and woman ; the resultant lessons and examples he bequeaths to his kind ; the *side* he is unquestionably on—the side of good or the side of evil. And these things are not to be gauged by the mere presence or absence of a licentious jest. Here, and now, in this nineteenth century, we are kept only too well aware that a story or a play may be written, through no one single speech or sentence of which could Mr. Bowdler draw his pen, and yet be immoral, unhuman, and unwholesome from end to end. Scores of such books and plays come into existence, attract their peculiar public, and then pass happily into oblivion ; but unhappily not before they have contributed their little share

towards undermining our children's respect for the charities, the purities, the noble reticences of life. It is these things which determine whether a writer is true to the highest talent committed to him ; whether he has dared to speak the word which God putteth in his mouth, or has betrayed his trust in return for the rewards of divination.

And this leads me to the second stumbling-block which our pious editor encountered. We no longer try to draw so hard-and-fast a line between the inspiration of Holy Scripture and that guidance of God's Holy Spirit which comes to every man who humbly seeks it, or listens for it. We are no longer offended when the writer even of profane stage-plays makes it evident from what divinest source his ideas of human dignity are derived. It is no shock to us to discover from Shakespeare's pages that some of the most spiritual morality of God's Word was familiar to him, and was " incarnated " by him in the noblest and purest of his characters. We are thankful for this, since the result has been to leaven our national life and imagination with high and great thoughts, clothed in the language of consummate poetry. It is sometimes said of a dramatic poet, that we can never know his real sentiments,

just because he is dramatic, and places them in the mouths of the characters to whom they are appropriate. This seems to me a shallow criticism, which falls to pieces when we allow ourselves to study the poet's treatment of human life as a whole. When we pass in review his leading creations, can we have a moment's doubt as to Shakespeare's own ideals, and the ideals he wishes us to sympathize with? Can we recall the marvellous series of his heroines—a Portia, an Imogen, a Cordelia, a Miranda, a Beatrice—and have a moment's doubt as to what Shakespeare revered as the ideal character of woman? Not here alone, but in his whole treatment of life and conduct, we are never left in doubt as to what side Shakespeare is on; he never juggles with the moral law, or sophisticates his reader's conscience. He never conceals his conviction that what men sow, that must they reap; and this, not merely in his tragedies but in his lighter vein of comedy—that frivolity in a Mercutio, unreality in a Jacques, genial sensuality in a Falstaff, must have their Nemesis. You will weary, my brethren, of these oft-told truths. I am indeed uttering truism after truism. But I am not citing them because we are assembled in a church.

Outside of God's House—wherever men do congregate, or wherever they muse in solitude—there abides this great cause of thankfulness to Almighty God, that the greatest name in our literature should be also our wisest and profoundest teacher.

And this brings me to the latter of the two thoughts which I said I would recall to you, how infinitely much we owe to the fact that this great poet and prophet should have been also dramatist. Given the same genius—the same unique intellect and imagination—think what it has been to us that these gifts should have had their outcome in a world of human personalities, living out their lives and revealing their true selves, developed before us, like ourselves, through circumstance and discipline. It is thus that Truth strikes home to us, and we recognize and welcome it, and take it to our hearts. It is from the men of the Bible that we learn most surely the lessons of the Bible—culminating in Him who took our human shape, that having seen Him, we should have seen the Father. It is so in human history ; it is so in the highest utterance of human literature. There is nothing more pathetic, I always think, in the incidents of Shakespeare's

life, than that he wrote for a limited theatre and audience, and that he seems to have had no suspicion of his transcendent greatness, or of the future that was in store for it. He never dreamed that for every one of his small audience in the Globe theatre, there would be hundreds and thousands who would know and give thanks to him for his printed page. But still, though it was to be so, it was the dramatic form which was to be the secret of the diffusion of his influence, and to make it the universal glory of Englishmen. "The proper study of mankind is man," may or may not be one of Pope's half-truths; but the dominant *interest* of mankind is for ever *man*—for man is naturally drawn to that which is like himself and which *lives*. True, it needs a Shakespeare among dramatists to give to his creations *life*. That is the privilege and prerogative of God's great gift, which we cannot define or analyze, the gift of genius. A man may draw characters, and yet never give them existence. Writer after writer comes and goes, and gives us so-called transcripts and pictures of life, but there is no vitality in store for them. "Can these dry bones live?" we ask in despair, and no comforting answer is returned from earth or heaven. Only

with the comparative few whom God has sent to bless His people, does He repeat, through His inspiration, the mighty miracle of genius ; and lo ! there arises the mystery of a "Breath," which breathes on the "dry bones," and the Breath comes into them and they live, and "stand upon their feet, an exceeding great army."

And of those whose creations are thus endued with perpetual life, independent of change and fashion, greatest among Englishmen is your great townsman. This is yet another truism, yet who can ignore such on a day like this? He is greatest, because he is our *teacher*. We are the better and the wiser because he was faithful to great truths which God commissioned him to speak. It is idle—and worse than idle,—for it is to be faithless to the Giver of every good and perfect gift—to deny the Divine ministry of great poets, merely because it takes forms with which we personally have no sympathy, or of which, in our narrowness and ignorance, we may disapprove. Be not deceived. "He that doeth righteousness is righteous ;" and he who speaketh words of righteousness learned them from God. He, the net result of whose life's task is to strengthen in us reverence

for goodness, and for whatever things pertain to God's kingdom, has done, with whatever alloy of human sin and imperfection, God's work in the world. And inasmuch as he has done so, in union with imaginative gifts unique in the world's history—gifts which have diffused his teaching through our daily thoughts and memories, and woven his words into the very fabric of our daily speech, it is wise and good that we should meet here to thank God for this mighty blessing, and to remember our responsibilities for it. "Spirits are not finely touched but to fine issues." We, too, each of us, in the humblest sphere and with the humblest talents, may claim a share in that great saying. What is it but, in another shape, the saying of our Lord and Saviour, "Let your light so shine before men, that, they may glorify your Father which is in Heaven"? This your annual Festival falls, by happy chance, in the month of mingled smiles and tears, when Nature's lesson is pre-eminently *life* made manifest in every flower and tree, breaking into verdure and beauty. In one of the loveliest even of Shakespeare's lines, he has noted

"The uncertain glory of an April day."

But this, *our* April day, will leave with us a glory not "uncertain," if it fosters in us a quickened sense of the goodness of God, and of the things He has prepared for them that love Him.

#### IV.

*April 25, 1897.*

### THE MAN AND THE POET.

BY THE REV. A. NICHOLSON, D.D.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights.”—ST. JAMES i. 17.

THE best of all gifts is the grace of God, and the knowledge of Christ, for “this is life eternal, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.” But all good gifts, each in its own order, come from God—genius and intellect, the powers of reason, science and learning, the faculty of the useful arts, art itself in the highest sense, the generous impulses and affections of human hearts that draw man to man—all, in short, on which depend the advancement of our race, the culture, the social and moral well-being, the progress and education of mankind. The moral educators of the world are these three—Religion, Philosophy, and Art. Beyond all and above all

is Religion. Philosophy, directed aright, is the handmaid of Religion : Art, true art, is spiritual in its origin, and belongs to the higher nature of the soul of man.

Art is ideal, but it bodies forth the ideal in outward expression to the senses. For its expression Art employs the materials of Nature—the rude stone of the mountain ; the marble of the quarry ; the vibrations of sound ; the lights and shades of a plain surface ; finally, articulate speech and words, the definite interpreters of thought. Employing these materials, Art finds its expression in the several forms of architecture, sculpture, music, painting, and poetry. Art, as it necessarily employs the materials of Nature, can never be divorced from Nature. But the Beautiful of Art stands higher than the Beautiful of Nature. Hegel, in his “ *Philosophy of Art*,” gives the essential reason of this : “ The beauty of Art,” he says, “ is beauty that is born and born again of the Spirit ; and as the Spirit with its productions stands higher than Nature with her phenomena, so does also the beauty of Art stand higher than the beauty of Nature.” Art reaches its highest form of expression in Poetry. Dramatic poetry is the most

perfect art of all ; and it represents the world involved and unfolding itself in the experiences of individual men, as it is, and as it ought really to be.

Michelet, writing on the Science of *Æsthetics*, has said that “ Art at its highest, in all its spheres, culminates on the higher standpoint of Religion.” Let me now make a corresponding statement, viz. Religion has associated itself with all the forms of Art, and so with all forms of poetry—lyric, epic, and dramatic. The Hebrew psalms and the hymns of the Church are examples of the lyric ; the noblest type of religious epos we have in Milton. These are obvious facts ; but some religious people are apt to overlook the fact equally obvious—the association of Religion with the Dramatic. If we look to the Bible itself, we find there the Dramatic in form. In Hebrew literature there is no complete drama, but there is a considerable approach to it. The Book of Job is a Dramatic Poem. In outward form there is no great difference between that sacred book and the drama of *Æschylus*. In the Song of Solomon we have actors and chorus. In the acted parables of the Old Testament we have short dramas. Coming down to Christian times, we find the dramatic form at an early period closely

associated with Religion. About the fourth century Gregory Nazianzen, Archbishop, and one of the great Fathers of the Church, banished pagan representations from Constantinople, and introduced the sacred drama. Gregory himself wrote many such dramas ; one of these has survived, the "*Christus Patiens*." In later centuries we find the representations, called *Mysteries*, written and sustained by the clergy. These were succeeded by the *Moralities*. In our own times, many have witnessed the Passion Play of Ober-Ammergau. During last Holy Week in Paris several Mystery Plays were performed. The series commenced with the "Woman of Samaria," a Gospel narrative in blank verse. This was followed by other sacred dramas. I may notice also that in the same week, in a church in London, the history of the Passion, in the 18th and 19th chapters of St. John, was dramatically given. The several persons in the dialogue were sustained by the clergy ; and the part of the Jewish populace was represented by the choir. What I am stating is wholly apart from a criticism of the merits or demerits of particular works and representations. People are free to differ critically and æsthetically. My point is simply a matter of

fact—that, from the earliest to the latest times, Religion has adopted for her own purpose all forms of poetry alike, and the dramatic no less than other forms.

I have said that Art is one of the great moral educators of the world. For the drama we claim alike high moral teaching and the perfection of Art. Of the world-famed poet, whose name stands first in our literature, I would say in the words of a modern critic, that “both from an artistic and a moral point of view, the highest honour that could be conferred upon a poet was the prerogative of Shakespeare.” As to Art, the great works of our poet are the highest development of the Dramatic Art. There are many considerations by which we might demonstrate this. I will content myself with one, the most essential and comprehensive, namely, his wonderful power of blending and uniting the Ideal with Nature. I have pointed out that Art brings to Nature idealism; Nature provides for Art the external materials of expression. The material must not absorb the ideal; on the other hand, the ideal must clothe itself in the garb and realities of Nature. Without the ideal we descend to gross embodiments, and “batten on the moor;”

without Nature we get only the vague Moralities of the Middle Ages, and personifications of ethical formulas devoid of living character. In the union of the Ideal and the Real is the perfection of Art. In one of his earlier works the great Poet defines once for all his artistic standpoint—

“The Poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven ;  
And, as imagination bodies forth,  
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.”

Here, in the “poet’s eye,” the glance of “imagination,” we have the inspiration of Idealism ; in the “turning to shapes,” in the “local habitation and a name,” we have the definite expression of the Ideal in the material and forms of nature.

Closely allied to this perfection of Art, and indeed, directly springing out of it, we have the moral teaching of the Poet. I do not attempt to disguise the fact, that in the past at least, sometimes unfavourable views have been taken. For instance, Dr. Samuel Johnson goes so far as to say, “he seems to write without any moral purpose.” It is amazing that such should be the judgment of a mind like that of Johnson. Doubtless,

we allow that there are some things which may give colour to such a judgment. In the dramas of Shakespeare there are persons to be found confessedly evil and base; these persons speak and act in conformity with their characters. Without such characters, no drama is possible in art or in real life. It is the antagonism of the evil which brings out the action of the good; the opposition of the ignoble and base brings out the action of the noble and virtuous. If there is to be any drama, if any nature in unison with art, evil agents must speak and act in conformity with the conditions of character. But to charge upon the poet, as proper to his own character, the sayings and sentiments of the evil agents in the drama is the extreme of injustice.

There is another point in which no small injustice has been done. Some persons seem to require the manners and fashions of speech of the nineteenth century from the men and women of the sixteenth. It is not just or reasonable to demand of any writer the conventionalities and proprieties of an age not his own.

At the same time, I am ready to allow that in the fairest shape there may be defects and

blemishes. That such are found in the great Poet's works, we must candidly acknowledge with regret. His contemporaries were wont to say of him, that he wrote without ever blotting out a line. There are lines I would fain he had blotted. But these we may treat as spots upon the sun; they cannot obscure the light of his moral teaching as a whole. We need not dwell upon them. The feet of the swan are not beautiful, but who thinks of them when they are hidden in the deep of the stream over which the majestic bird sails in the beauty of his snowy plumes?

It is not too much to say that we might, perhaps, construct from the works of the Poet a system of morals. I can only now point out a few dominant characteristics of Shakesperean ethics. With him, *moral responsibility* is a first axiom. Man is endowed with a freedom of will, in relation to virtue and vice. On this rests his responsibility in action and passion. If we are "underlings,"

"The fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves."

There is a fault in many writers, which you will never find in Shakespeare. *He never clothes vice in the garb of attraction.* Some poets of genius, even in the present century, are justly chargeable

with that moral fault. Did not Byron give the type, so popular in the earlier half of the century, of the romantic mystery of guilt, the attractive sinner "linked with one virtue and a thousand crimes"? Young men of the period affected the type; they turned down their collars, turned up their eyes, violated conventionalities, posed as misunderstood by society; their passions, they said, had consumed themselves to ashes. In our own days, have you not seen flaunting in the public eye the "woman with a past"? I devoutly hope, that demoralizing nightmare has finally vanished from the scene. With Shakespeare all here is different. With him vice is treated as the base badge of the lower nature. And here, let me say, that we owe a debt of gratitude to those high-minded and talented professors of the histrionic art, who, as in this Stratford Commemoration, by the reproduction of the great works of the Poet, are doing so much towards the restoration of a pure æsthetic criterion, and the moral elevation of the public taste.

One of Shakespeare's essential factors in human analysis is *Conscience*. Even in the most depraved and guilty he shows Conscience to be alive and

awake. This is true to nature. We say of a bad man, "he has no conscience,"—there is no truth in that; it is merely a rhetorical hyperbole, a fashion of speech. Even Felix had a conscience—when St. Paul reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled. The devil has a conscience, for "the devils believe and tremble." In all cases the great Poet vindicates, with a stern moral justice, the power and terrors of conscience. See there the guilty Queen; she has achieved by crime the aims of ambition, but she cannot rest. She sleeps, she dreams, she walks in dreams and sleeps, but Conscience is wide awake to torture her. See here the Dane, the fratricide, haunted by a brother's murder; he is forced to his knees, yet the prayer attempted is but the writhing of a limed soul upon the rack of conscience.

Over this freedom of man, his passion, his guilt, his conscience—over all, there is presented to us, in Shakespeare's ethics, the supreme rule of a just and retributive *Providence*.

"Though the mills of God grind slowly,  
Yet they grind exceeding small;  
Though with patience He stands waiting,  
With exactness grinds He all."

This ideal of Providence is bodied forth in the natural issues of the world ; and the dramatic consummation is not the impunity of prosperous guilt, but the punishment of the sinner.

There is one more point in which he unites the perfection of Art with moral teaching—namely, in the immediate moral effect of his greatest works on the reader or spectator. The doctrine of the great critic of antiquity upon the aim proper to Tragedy has never been disputed. It is laid down by Aristotle, that Tragedy by the means of sympathy and terror aims at the *purification of these and like passions*. Shakespeare, though he had “small Latin and less Greek,” though he may never have read Aristotle’s *Poetic*, yet by a wonderful intuition of Art combined with an unerring moral instinct, has achieved the great end of Tragedy. No one but feels, after an adequate representation of those dramas, that the Poet has effected the highest practical moral of Art—the purification of passion.

From the moral power of his works, if time permitted, I might pass, by a natural transition, to the character of the man. A few words upon that. A detailed biography will never be possible.

The ascertained facts are comparatively few ; there are some traditions of more or less value. But the labours of critics of recent times, partly by means of metrical tests, partly from the resources of a higher criticism, appear to have established, at all events approximately, an intelligent, chronological order in the works of Shakespeare, which may give us, at least, a general idea of the unfolding of his character in the course of years, and the current of his inner life. Following such a clue, we may trace the follies and sins of youth ; the aberrations, it may be, the grievous falls of early manhood, amid the perils of a homeless life in London ; we may mark an apparent interval of darkness, depression, and sorrow ; the Sonnets especially bear evidences of the depth of this gloom. Succeeding this, we reach an interval in which, in bitterness of soul, he dwells upon the disillusion of life, the vice, the crime, the treachery of the world. Then comes a change ; he emerges into light, into reconciliation with mankind, with the forbearance and philosophy of mercy and compassion. Finally, we find him home again in peace, here in his native Stratford. We imagine him once more under the sacred

shadow of this church where we are now assembled ; I think I see him wandering in these meadows, and gathering the same wild flowers which he loved in childhood, and which your children gather now ; I see him surrounded by the ties of home, still in peace until the sunset, when he sinks to his rest by the stream of Avon, in the Tomb in this Chancel on which your wreaths are laid this day, where his ashes undisturbed are reposing amongst you. William Shakespeare, man and poet ! When I think of the *man*, I find no angel. Who amongst us is the Angel ? I find, I say, a man who passed through a fiery ordeal, and reached, as I believe, a moral elevation. When I think of the *poet*, I am reminded of his own words, "What a piece of work is man ! How noble in reason ! How infinite in faculties ! In action, how like an angel ; in apprehension, how like a god !" As to genius, we stand from him at an immeasurable distance. Nevertheless, we are all gifted by Providence with powers and faculties, qualifying us, every one in his own order, for solemn duties, which constitute our responsibilities. Whatever we are, and wherever, the first call to every one of us is to a life of

moral and Christian duty. For that, without Divine help, we are powerless. Neither genius, nor art, nor philosophy can solve for us the moral problems of life without the Grace of God. We are not shadows pursuing shadows, but immortal beings with immortal hopes. We battle in a life of trial and temptation for the prize of our high calling. If we win the prize, it will only be by the Grace of Christ, and by the quality of that supreme Mercy, the attribute of God Himself.

V.

*April 23, 1899.*

## A THANKSGIVING FOR SHAKESPEARE.

BY THE VERY REV. C. W. STUBBS, D.D., DEAN  
OF ELY.

“What thanksgiving can we render again unto God for him, for all the joy?”—1 THESS. iii. 9.

THE special Festival of this day—at once a saint’s day of the English Church and a hero-day of the English nation, for it is the day of St. George, the patron saint of England and of chivalry, and it is the birthday and the death-day of Shakespeare—happens to synchronize this year with the Third Sunday after Easter.

We have already, at our earliest service this morning, celebrated the greatest Eucharist of our Church, that Sacrament of Thanksgiving for the risen Lord, which not only should throw its consecration over all our other acts of worship in this place

to-day, but also should consecrate for us all realms of human thought and action. It is quite natural, therefore, that at this later service, the "note of thanksgiving," which we would most wish to emphasize, should be for him whose power and presence must always, I should imagine, be felt more vividly in this place than elsewhere in England.

In this memorial service, then, "let us render again unto God for him thanksgiving for all the joy," thanksgiving for all the mighty achievement of his poetic genius, of his prophetic vision as a supreme interpreter of human life—"how noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in apprehension how like a God!"—thanksgiving for all the joy which has come down to us through the centuries as his gift to the English race, to the human race, for ever.

In one of the most beautiful Mythes of Plato—the *Phædrus*—there is a passage in which that poet-philosopher attempts to explain the origin of the spiritual and prophetic gifts of humanity. Under the poetic mysticism of that magnificent parable, Plato tells how on stated days human souls follow in the train of the immortal gods, and,

rising above the material world, attain to the vision of the unseen and eternal ; and how, though falling back again once more to the level of earth, they retain throughout life the memory of their beatific vision, as the impulse and motive of all high thought and righteous deed.

My friends, for us Christians the dream of Plato is realized in the gospel of Christ. In the glory which the Son of man revealed, we recognize the transfiguration of human life, and find, some of us, in Him, our spiritual Master in the eternal life of truth, wisdom, and love, the inspiring motive and spring of our lives, and having once seen "the light and whence it flows," learn also to recognize in other human souls—saints, poets, prophets—who exhibit any portion of this gift, signs of the presence of the Invisible Helper and Divine Comrade, whom we believe to be the very and incarnate Son of God.

It has always seemed to me that for the human soul there are no more natural acts of public worship than those which consecrate our feelings of reverence and gratitude for the memory of departed saints and the lives of great men, and which recognize the moral discipline there is to be

gained from the enthusiastic commemoration of great ideals. Not only do

“Their phantoms arise before us,  
Our loftier brothers but one in blood,  
At bed and board they lord it o’er us,  
With looks of beauty and words of good.”

But in the solemn service of worship their lives and their example give us not only motive and inspiration, but are also in some sort a pledge for the consecration of similar gifts, however small, in ourselves. And therefore I have often wondered why it is that, believing, as we profess to do, in the continuous present inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, in the living realization of the doctrine of the communion of saints, our Church can rest satisfied with the imperfect reflection of the great personalities of even her past history, which our calendar suggests.

Indeed, I have always thought that there is much to be learnt in this direction from such a calendar as that which was drawn up at the beginning of the century by Auguste Comte, as the basis of the so-called religion of humanity. Some of you are no doubt familiar with that calendar, either in its original form or in the form of that

most fascinating biographical manual, published a few years ago by the Positivist Committee in London, and entitled a *New Calendar of Great Men*. In that modern *Acta Sanctorum* are arranged a series of typical names, illustrious in all departments of thought and power, beginning with the great lawgiver of the Hebrews, and ending with the poets and thinkers of the first generation of the present century. There are in all some 558 names of eminent men and women in this calendar, so grouped and classified as to convey a vivid impression of the gradual development of human society, of its unity and continuity of progress, ranging over all ages and nations, commemorating not only what Churchmen would call the strictly saintly ideals, but all the great names of the world's heroes: leaders of industry, as Gutenberg and Arkwright and Watt; poets, painters, and musicians, as Dante and Shakespeare,<sup>1</sup> and Raphael and Mozart; philosophers, as St. Thomas Aquinas and Descartes and Bacon; men of science, as Bichat, Galileo, and Newton;

<sup>1</sup> In Auguste Comte's calendar, the tenth month of the year is dedicated to Shakespeare and the modern drama, and from him renamed, as are its seventh days also from Calderon, Corneille, Molière, and Mozart.

statesmen, as William the Silent and Cromwell and Frederick the Great.

Compare such a roll of the heroes of Western civilization as this, incomplete as it may be, and yet one in which, as John Stuart Mill said, "no kind of human eminence really useful is omitted, except that which is merely negative and destructive," with the calendar of our own Church, with its less than fifty names of non-apostolic saints, and of these not a dozen whose memories we, as Englishmen, can specially commemorate as national heroes or benefactors ; and do we not feel that with whatever useful purpose the English Reformers retained in our calendar the names of the so-called Black-letter Saints, it certainly could not have been with any desire of providing such a concrete picture of the sacredness and the sureness, and the continuity of the history of the English Church, much less of the English nation, as might, through the sense of social communion, and the feeling of an historic past, and the delight in the names of the mighty dead, exert so potent an influence on the character and the conduct of the living ?

And yet, surely, to bring the national life and

spirit and character into creative touch with the solemnizing liturgical influences of common worship ; to bring home to our people the sense of the sacredness of the national life, and the sureness and continuity of our England's story, as part of the design of God, and as one of the truest means, by His grace, of elevating and sustaining what Burke once called "the ancient and inbred integrity and piety of the English people ;"—should be one of the most important, one of the most religious, functions of our National Church.

Week by week, it is true, in the public supplications of the Litany, English Churchmen are invited to join in the aspiration, "O God, we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have declared unto us, the noble works that Thou didst in their days, and in the old time before them." And yet how little does our Church do to give reality to this supplication ! how little does she really do to help us to people with noble names and worthy memories the vacancies of All Saints' Day, or to fill up for ourselves the dwarfed and impoverished Anglican calendar with new types of national saintship, much less "to hold our march upon the loftier summits, along the central range, to live in the company

of heroes and saints and men of genius," and thus help "the man of ordinary proportion and inferior metal to think out the rounded circle of his thought . . . to divest his will of its surroundings, and to rise above the pressure of time and race and circumstance, to choose the star that guides his course, to correct and test and assay his convictions of the Light within, and with a resolute conscience and ideal courage to remodel and reconstitute the character which birth and education gave him!"<sup>1</sup>

No, my friends, we cannot afford wantonly to lose sight of our great men and memorable lives. We must cherish their memories as objects of national admiration and worship.

Such a solemn Commemoration Service, expressing in modern form, and with modern spirit, the old mediæval "Obit" or "Yearsmind," we, to-day, are celebrating in this Memorial Thanksgiving for England's greatest poet. May our debt of gratitude to his memory be reverently and lovingly acknowledged! And, that I may not be misunderstood, let me repeat that in rendering such debt in this

<sup>1</sup> Lord Acton's Inaugural Lecture on *The Study of History*, pp. 13, 14.

place, we need not think we shall be in any sense trenching upon His inviolable honour, who must always remain the ever-present Centre of our worship here. For it is only through the study of the many and varying qualities of His servants that we learn by degrees to welcome the fulness and the richness of His ideal manhood. Much less in doing this honour to Shakespeare to-day do we arrogate to ourselves any authority of final judgment as to his personal character or life. In thanking God, then, for the gift of the heroes and the saints, the prophets and the kings, of England, for their lives and thoughts, we are recognizing our national benefaction, and so far acknowledging the power and love of God in those by whose ministry it was made known to us.

I have already indicated my desire to speak to you to-day of Shakespeare as a national prophet. You will rightly ask me in what sense I use this term. Let me answer you in the words of two modern poets.

In his magnificent prose essay on *The Defence of Poetry*, the poet Shelley thus compares the functions of the poet and the prophet—

“Poets, according to the circumstance of the age and nation in which they appeared, were called in the earlier epochs of the world, legislators or prophets. A poet essentially comprises and unites both these characters. For he not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs of the flower and fruit of latest time. Not that I assert poets to be prophets in the gross sense of that word, or that they can foretell the form as surely as they foreknow the spirit of events. Such is the pretence of superstition, which would make poetry an attribute of prophecy rather than prophecy an attribute of poetry.”

And this is how the great American poet, Russell Lowell, has expressed a similar thought in imperishable verse—

“To know the heart of all things was his duty,  
All things did speak to him to make him wise,  
And with a sorrowful and conquering beauty  
The soul of all looked grandly from his eyes.  
He gazed on all within him and without him,  
He watched the flowing of Time’s steady tide,  
And shapes of glory floated all about him  
And whispered to him, and he prophesied.  
Than all men he more fearless was, and freer,  
And all his brethren cried with one accord—  
‘Behold the holy man ! behold the seer !  
Him who hath spoken with the unseen Lord.’”

But you will ask me very probably, and some of you perhaps with some surprise—Can you really speak of Shakespeare, even in this sense, as a

prophet ? Can you speak of him in any sense even as a religious man ?

My friends, I should not care to speak of him in this place at all if I did not think that he was both.

If the underlying and almighty essence of this world be good, then it is likely—is it not?—that the writer who most deeply approached to that essence will be himself good. There is a religion of week-days as well as of Sundays, a religion of “cakes and ale” as well as of pews and altar-cloths. This England lay before Shakespeare as it lies before us all, with its green fields, and its long hedgerows, and its many trees, and its great towns, and its endless hamlets, and its motley society, and its long history, and its bold exploits, and its gathering power ; and he saw that they were good. To him, perhaps, more than to any one else, has it been given to see that they were a great unity, a great religious object ; that if you could only descend to the inner life, to the deep things, to the secret principles of its noble vigour, to the essence of character, to what we know of Hamlet and seem to fancy of Ophelia, we might, so far as we are capable of so doing, understand

the Nature which God has made. Let us, then, think of Shakespeare, not as a teacher of dry dogmas or a sayer of hard sayings, but as

“A priest to us all  
Of the wonder and bloom of the world ;”

a teacher of the hearts of men and women ; one from whom may be learnt something of that inmost principle that ever modulates

“With murmurs of the air,  
And motions of the forest and the sea,  
And voice of living beings, and woven hymns  
Of night and day and the deep heart of man.”<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare was not a prophet or preacher, of course, in the same sense as Mrs. Barbauld, or Dr. Doddridge, or Dr. Watts, or even John Keble. But perhaps he was something better and higher. He rises above mere morals, and preaches to us, prophecies to us, of life.

The gospel of Jesus Christ, remember, is not morality only, not a book of morals, but the story of a life—a life in which all men can see the perfection of human character, the divinity of forgiveness, of perpetual mercy, of constant patience, of endless peace, of everlasting gentleness ; and is

<sup>1</sup> *Estimates of some Englishmen and Scotchmen*, by Walter Bagehot, p. 270.

there any prophet of our modern dispensation who knew these things better, or could prophesy of them more vividly through life, than did Shakespeare ?

In an evil day too, remember, Shakespeare prophesied ; he taught the most gracious and gentle precepts—too good, I fancy, almost to have been listened to, if men had quite known what they were receiving. There are some things in Shakespeare I almost fancy he might have been burnt for had he been a theologian—just as, certainly, there are things about politics, about civil liberty, which, had he been a politician or a statesman, would have brought him to the block.<sup>1</sup> But God made him a

<sup>1</sup> It is argued by some critics, from certain indications in the plays (the Jack Cade scenes, for example, in *2 Henry VI.*), that Shakespeare had no sympathy with political freedom or with democratic ideas ; had, indeed, a very wholesome feudal disdain of the many-headed monster. And it is true, no doubt, that Shakespeare was not a modern democrat. But it is equally true that there was not a modern democracy in “the spacious days of great Elizabeth.” In the Tudor period the People had not emerged. Representative democracy is, in fact, an entirely modern institution, which throws out of court, therefore, all interested appeals to the sad fate of democratic (so-called) institutions in old days. And there are certainly those among Shakespeare students (Werner, for example, in his *Fahrbuch*) who discover in the author of *Hamlet* and of *Lear* a thinker in the foremost ranks of modern and patriotic spirits ; a forerunner of the struggle for freedom in which England was to engage first among the nations of Europe. But Shakespeare was too human and too permanent—shall we say too “eternal” ?—to be a party politician. “A plague on both your houses !” is his nearest to a political cry. A poet of the nineteenth century, of course, who had

player and neither of these other things. And so he could teach a message to his age which it much needed—lessons of peace, gentleness, mercy, patience, long-suffering. He was no priest, it is true, he waved no censor; yet who can tell, when we consider the thousands of souls who have learnt the lessons of Shakespeare, how much he had done to humanize, nay, to Christianize mankind! His doctrine may not be preached to men in set dogma and maxim. It may rather, perhaps, distil as dew. Yet many a man who has read *The Merchant of Venice*, or pondered over that sad drama of a sinful soul in *Macbeth*, or watched that terrible attempt of the wicked king to pray, in *Hamlet*, or in no care for political theories and philosophies of history, would show himself to be lacking in that very sympathy with humanity which made Shakespeare what he was. But Shakespeare himself dealt with men, and not with ideas. He has no abstract political principles to apply, even in his story of the contest of Lancaster and York. And the nearest to a political principle you can get anywhere in Shakespeare is the consciousness of his faith in the divine right of the kingliest nature to be king. Indeed, in this respect, I think we may guess that Shakespeare in the nineteenth century would echo the noble words of Keats—

“Where is the poet? show him, show him,  
Muses nine, that I may know him.  
It is the man who with a man  
Is an equal, be he king  
Or poorest of the beggar clan,  
Or any other wondrous thing  
A man may be ‘twixt ape and Plato.’”

*Measure for Measure* has grasped the key to that marvellously sad but most moral story in the lines—

“He who the sword of Heaven would bear  
Must be holy as severe,”

has heard sermons more precious probably than any homilies of the pulpit, lessons, I venture to think, as sweet or sweeter than any that have fallen on the world since the days of the apostles. For think of it for a moment in this way.

We are all familiar with the thought that it is Christ's life which gives to the Master's words their force, and we confess that love of Jesus Himself is the only motive strong enough to make men keep His commandments. St. John sums up the significance of all that in the phrase, “The Word was made flesh.”

It is not irreverence, I think, to point out that Shakespeare's teaching has the same advantage over that of the ordinary preacher that the teaching of the evangelists has over the teaching of Solomon. *He gives us a man to know instead of a proverb.* It is *through words made flesh* that he teaches us.

The time at our disposal is all too short, alas!

to make this special interpretation of Shakespeare's method as a teacher, as a national prophet, plain to you.

But let me take two concrete examples of his method, which will, at any rate, furnish, I think, each one of us with two practical lessons for our own everyday working lives. And the first lesson is an appropriate one for St. George's Day. For it is a lesson of chivalry.

I am sure that many of you must be familiar with that noble passage in Mr. Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, in which that great writer calls attention to the fact that, in the strict sense of the word, Shakespeare has no heroes—only heroines. "There is not one entirely heroic figure," Mr. Ruskin says, "in all his plays, except the slight sketch of Henry the Fifth. . . . Whereas there is hardly a play that has not a perfect woman in it, steadfast in grave hope and errorless purpose; Cordelia, Desdemona, Isabella, Hermione, Imogen, Queen Katharine, Perdita, Sylvia, Viola, Rosalind, Helena, and last and perhaps loveliest, Virgilia, are all faultless, conceived in the highest heroic type of humanity."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Sesame and Lilies*, pp. 126-131.

Now, the lesson of this fact is not, I think, what Mr. Ruskin apparently conceives it to be. It is not, that is to say, that women are perfect in character—"infallibly faithful and wise counsellors—incorruptibly just and pure examples—strong always to sanctify, even when they cannot save"—in a way which is not possible to men. But the lesson is surely this. *That Shakespeare evidently thought them so.* That is the point to be grasped. Shakespeare kept true through his whole life to the youthful, the chivalric, ideal of a good woman, expressed in words which, in *Measure for Measure*, he puts into the mouth of the jesting Lucio, describing Isabella,—in her virginal strength and self-possessed dignity, perhaps the noblest of all the heroines of the plays—

"I hold you as a thing enskyed and sainted ;  
By your renouncement, an immortal spirit ;  
And to be talked with in sincerity,  
As with a saint."

And, my friends, what is worth remembering about this reverence of Shakespeare for women, which surrounds them for him to the end of his days—it is in *A Winter's Tale*, one of his latest plays, that he draws for us the gracious simplicity, the wifely perfection, of Hermione ; and in *The*

*Tempest*, the latest of his plays, the peerless purity, the maiden sweetness, of the most admired Miranda—with an almost divine light and glamour, is that it is just what the ordinary man of the world too often despises as the mistake of his inexperienced youth. And yet who was more “the man of the world” than Shakespeare? His knowledge of human nature was immense and infallible, and in no sense did he avoid the world and its temptations. He lived, too, in the midst of London town life, of theatrical life, such as we know it to have been in Elizabeth’s day, coarse, corrupt, feculent, and yet he preserved in his heart the feeling, natural, I venture to assert, to uncorrupted youth, of the divinity and sacredness of womanhood, so that in his latest as in his earliest plays his strong spirit, so keen to detect human weakness and sin, pays woman the involuntary homage of laying aside, in face of her excellence, its weapon of criticism. It is Iago, who is nothing if not critical, who dares to doubt of Desdemona’s truth. He, it is true, as Mrs. Jameson says in her *Characteristics of Women*, would have “bedevilled an angel.” But, alas! there are men in our own day who, with none of Iago’s wickedness, in either

intention or act, are still tainted by the evil spirit of the world, and in their inmost thought dare to judge as he did of the virtue of woman. But such a man was not Shakespeare. He, at fifty years of age, still feels, in presence of his heroines, like a lover before his first love.

Seriously, then, do I beg you to ponder this fact, that the reverence for woman, which too many men affect to lose in their teens, was retained by the myriad-minded Shakespeare to the end of his days.<sup>1</sup>

One further word and lesson. You remember the character of Prospero in *The Tempest*. Did it ever strike you to identify that great enchanter with Shakespeare himself in the closing years of life? The thought is surely a fruitful one. For *The Tempest*, the latest of all his plays, is an ideal allegory of human life, with under-meanings everywhere, in every line of it, for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear; but with all its lessons unforced, unsophisticated, illusive, unperceived

<sup>1</sup> See on this subject Mrs. Jameson's *Characteristics of Women*, pp. 24, 25; and Dowden's *Mind and Art of Shakespeare*, pp. 110-113; and also a very able address, dealing, however, chiefly with the ethical teaching of *Measure for Measure*, contributed by my friend, Mr. Ronald Bayne, to a volume of *Sermons on the Prophets and Kings of England*, which I published (S.P.C.K.) in 1887.

indeed by those whose eyes are closed, whose ears are dull of hearing: the scene of it nowhere, anywhere, for it is in the Fortunate Island of the soul of man, that vexed land of Imagination hung between the upper and the nether world; the characters of it, types, abstractions—Womanhood, Youth, the People,—all of them more or less victims of illusion, all of them losing their way in this enchanted Realm of Life, except only Prospero, the great mage, absolute lord of the island, who could summon to his service, at a moment's notice, every shape of merriment or of passion, every figure in the great tragi-comedy of life, and who, being none other surely than Shakespeare himself, "not one, but all mankind's epitome," could run easily through the whole scale of human passion and thought, from "Nature's woodnotes wild," or the homely commonplaces of existence, the chimney-corner wisdom of "Master Goodman Dull," to the transcendental subtilties of

"No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do change,  
Thy pyramids built up with newer light  
To me are nothing novel, nothing strange,  
They are but dressings of a former sight."

It is not only because Prospero was a great enchanter, about to break his magic staff, to "drown

his book deeper than ever plummet sounded," to dismiss his "airy spirits," and to return to the practical service of the State, that we identify the philosopher-duke with Shakespeare the poet-prophet. It is rather because the temper of Prospero is the temper of Shakespeare in those last days, when he came back to the dear old English home here in Stratford, to its sweetest, simplest, homeliest things, finding the daily life of this little place, the men and women here, the Nature all around, the green fields, the sweet hedgerow flowers, the quiet woods, the softly flowing Avon, good enough for him ; despising nothing as common or unclean ; curious of all things and of all men, but never scornful ; humorous, sympathetic, tolerant ; his wide-viewing mind at last looking back from the altitudes of thought to which he had attained, on all the pageantry of the lower world which he had abandoned, through a strange, pathetic, ideal light.

"Our revels now are ended ; these our actors,  
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and  
Are melted into air, into thin air ;  
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,  
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,  
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,  
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve ;

And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,  
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep. Sir, I am vex'd ;  
Bear with my weakness ; my old brain is troubled.  
Be not disturb'd with my infirmity :  
If you be pleased, retire into my cell,  
And there repose ; a turn or two I'll walk,  
To still my beating mind."

And so he ends—Prospero or Shakespeare. In the epilogue to the play you have the key-note of this self-mastered character, this self-posessed grandeur of a completely disciplined will which is common to both, to Shakespeare as to Prospero—forgiveness and freedom.

" And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be relieved by prayer ;  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults."

And so, too, I will end—how better ?—with those lessons of freedom and forgiveness: the true freedom which only comes from service, the true pardon which only comes to those who forgive because they have been forgiven.

Have you learnt those lessons? The root of all true religion, believe me, lies there. What do you know of the true "service which is perfect freedom"? What is your definition of life? How

do you conceive of it to yourself? Is it, do you think, as Shakespeare has elsewhere said, "a tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing;" or is it a mission of service to your fellows for Christ's sake? God grant you may answer—Life is service! Life is duty! Life is a mission! All for love, and the world well lost. For Jesus said, "Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake, shall save it."

And the lesson of pardon—have you made that, too, yours? "The tongues of dying men"—our poet says—"enforce attention like deep harmony." And from the Cross of Jesus and His last dying prayer, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do," we have all learnt—God grant it!—to recognize the ethical beauty of the spirit of forgiveness; but do we equally acknowledge its moral power? its redeeming power? "Father! . . . forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us." So daily we pray. Brothers! sisters! do we truly realize this power of forgiveness, this social power of remitting or retaining sins, this priestly power of humanity? Ah! believe me, just so far as we exercise it lovingly and wisely in our lives and

with our lips, we help men away from sin : just so far as we do not exercise it, or exercise it wrongly, we drive men into sin. And, my friends, from which of your Christian teachers will you learn of that unstrained "quality of mercy"—of that earthly power of free forgiveness "which then shows likest God's when mercy seasons justice"—more unerringly than you will from Shakespeare? He was no priest, I repeat, he waved no censer. But just as in regard to that other lesson of freedom, Shakespeare does seem to give to each one of us courage and energy and strength to dedicate ourselves and our work to that service, to that mission—whatever it may be—which life has revealed to us as best and highest and most real :—so, also, with regard to this other lesson of the redemptive power of a priestly humanity, this social force of true forgiveness, I do not hesitate to say that in Shakespeare's censer there burns truly and fragrantly and steadily—

"Such incense as of right belongs  
To the true shrine,  
Where stands the Healer of all wrongs,  
In light Divine."

## VI.

*April 23, 1899.*

### A POET'S INSPIRATION.

BY THE REV. GEORGE ARBUTHNOT, M.A.

“And the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth.”—  
NUM. xxiii. 16.

WE have read in the First Lesson to-day, both at Matins and Evensong, the history of Balaam. It is, I think, an interesting, even a fascinating one, not unlike some of those fairy tales which formed the romances of our childhood. The hero appears, sprung from unknown parentage, amid the dim mysterious mountains of the East. We picture him of weird and even terrible appearance, with eye accustomed to gaze beyond mortal ken, with long flowing beard and patriarchal mien. As the poet of the *Christian Year* says, addressing him—

“O for a sculptor's hand,  
That thou might'st take thy stand,  
Thy wild hair floating on the Eastern breeze,  
Thy trained yet open gaze  
Fixed on the desert haze,  
As one who deep in heaven some airy pageant sees.”

He comes, and he is met by the great King of Moab, that nation which dwelt in the fastnesses of the rocks, and then he is escorted to the top of Pisgah—the lofty peak jutting out towards Jordan, which gave a sight, to the dying Moses, of all the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and of Judah even unto the utmost sea. There he stands and gazes upon the extreme verge, the utmost part, the mere fringe of the camp of Israel, and he takes up his parable, and pours forth his rhapsody—

“From Aram hath Balak brought me,  
The King of Moab, from the mountains of the East :  
Saying, Come, curse me Jacob,  
And come, menace Israel.  
How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed ?  
Or how shall I menace, whom God hath not menaced ?  
For from the top of the rocks I see him,  
And from the hills I behold him :  
Lo, it is a people who dwelleth alone,  
And that is not reckoned among the nations.  
Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
And the number of the offspring of Israel ?  
Let me die the death of the righteous,  
And be my last estate like his !”

The story is interesting to us because of the

picturesque figure of its hero—but also because of its revelation to us concerning God's dealings with mankind. We who enjoy the full privileges of Christianity, we who live in the glorious noonday light of the gospel,—we are often in danger of exclusiveness in the matter of religion. And the danger is increased by a cursory method of reading the Old Testament Scriptures. There we think we find that God chose a people for Himself, even the descendants of Abraham His friend ; that He separated them from the other nations of the world, and then left all the rest of His creatures to grope in darkness and die in ignorance. This is the view, the false view, which a careless reading of the Bible might suggest. But the mistake of it is clearly revealed by such stories as that of Balaam, where we find a man living remote from and having no dealings with the descendants of Abraham, yet acquainted with the God of Abraham, holding communications with Jehovah, and even permitted to be His mouthpiece. Like the story of Melchizedek, or of Job, or of the Queen of Sheba, the story of Balaam bids us not dare to limit God's almighty goodness, nor to deny that grace may flow through channels we

know not of, to fields which are beyond our sight.

God met Balaam. We gather from preceding verses that the scene of this meeting was "an high place," or, as the marginal reading has it, when "he went solitary." Balaam was alone when the Lord met him, and put a word in his mouth. How was it done? Was it by some Divine breath playing upon the chords of his inmost being, making them vibrate and give forth sounds, which he perhaps hardly understood? Was it some breath of the Spirit, like the wind sweeping over the strings of an Æolian harp, bringing forth notes which neither wind nor harp alone could produce? That inspiration, which stirred the prophets of old to utter things which they knew not, when they searched, as St. Peter says, "what or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"? For certainly there was not only poetry but prophecy in Balaam's mouth, which we can feel sure he but dimly understood. "I shall see Him, but not now: I shall behold Him, but not nigh: there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of

Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth."

Or was it by angelic agency that the Lord met Balaam, and put a word in his mouth? A reference to the previous chapter might seem to favour this view, for we read there that the angel who opposed his passage in the path of the vineyards said, "Go with the men; but only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak."

Or was it in some trance or vision, as in a dream of the night, that God put the word in Balaam's mouth? Dreams are mysterious things — the dreams of the Bible more especially. It is all very well to talk of physical causes for those thoughts which sweep across the sleeper's brain; but many of us can tell of dreams which cannot lightly be dismissed as nothing better than "poor fancy's followers." And it was in the night that God spoke to Balaam in his house at Pethor, when He first refused and afterwards consented to his going with the princes of Moab.

How did the Lord meet with Balaam, and put a word in his mouth? We cannot answer the question—we can only tell the sequel. What the prophet spoke was God's speech; his words were

God's words ; and the term which can alone describe his mission is *Inspiration*—that Divine afflatus which designates that a man is “chosen from above by inspiration of celestial grace.” Thus we see the Lord choosing human agency for the expounding of His truth, with the result that even from unworthy lips came utterances of beauty and holiness, which are unsurpassed in the pages of the Bible.

See, for example, how he—outsider though he be—describes the blessedness of the people of God : “How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel ! As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river-side, as the trees of lign aloes which the Lord hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.”

Or again, how he looked forward into the dim distance, and descried the birth of the Messiah, when he declared, “Out of Jacob shall come He that shall have the dominion.”

That is what we mean by inspiration. It may be of different degrees, and shown in different ways, and achieving different ends ; but it is God by His Spirit urging and forcing and driving the man further than he would otherwise be carried. And if Balaam is a remarkable development of it, and

my text a terse description of its method, we cannot fail to perceive other illustrations of it in those who, in one path of life or another, have won what the world calls distinction.

To-day we have before us, on this annual Commemoration, the case of a man whose story is as interesting and as fascinating as that of Balaam. Had the literature of the world been in the same condition then as it is now, I can imagine Hebrew writers expending long labours in elaborating an early life of Balaam passed amid the mountains of the East, and tracing how its effects were shown in his prophecy ; just as to-day we find English writers searching amid fact and fiction for anything which will add colour and charm to the story of William Shakespeare. We do not to-night follow their lead ; but I merely say that when we speak of him and his works, we may take the words of the text and declare that the Lord met him, and put a word in his mouth. We can't, indeed, define how the inspiration came. "A poet is born, not made," is a trite saying, but it simply amounts to this, that the poetic flame is kindled by no earthly torch, and that genius is not the result of education. No, we can't say how, or where, or when the Lord

met Shakespeare ; but we can trace one way in which evidence of such meeting is clearly displayed. I don't mean only in the fact that the poet's utterances are good and true and noble, but because they are so full of references to, and quotations from, the very Word of God in the Bible.

The Lord met Shakespeare : Shakespeare knew the Bible. Every one who studies his plays must perceive that. Not only is the phraseology alike, which, of course, is accounted for by the contemporaneousness of our Authorized Version and the plays, but the very words and incidents of Holy Writ are frequently referred to.

How few who listen to the *Merchant of Venice* have any idea of the source from which the exclamation is drawn, "A Daniel come to judgment, yea, a Daniel"! How very few have remarked that in that touching description of a dying man in *Henry V.*, "a babbled of green fields," there is a reference to the words of the Psalmist, so dear to the dying Christian, "The Lord is my Shepherd . . . He shall feed me in a green pasture, and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil"!

Or, just to add one more example, let us recall that quotation from the Sermon on the Mount in *As You Like It*—

“ He that doth the ravens feed,  
Yea providently caters for the sparrow,  
Be comfort to my age.”

And Shakespeare's knowledge of the Bible was not shown in his works alone. It surely was not an accident that his two daughters bore the names of the two chief women mentioned in the Apocrypha. I think we may infer from it that the study of the Bible, including as it did then, as I would it did now, the reading of the Apocrypha—that study which formed such a marked feature of English life in those early Reformation days—was not neglected by the poet, who in its sacred pages met the Lord.

And thus not only in the secret musings of his soul, not only through his eye reading the pages of nature (though Shakespeare was not a keen admirer of natural scenery, as few dwellers in level countries are), not only in his power to grasp and master and utilize the works of other men, but also in the most sacred of all literature, the Lord met Shakespeare, and put a word in his

mouth. And that word has echoed round the world, and we hope has made the world wiser and better and more pleasing to its Creator than it would otherwise have been.

But, brethren, what is true of Shakespeare is true, though it may not be so apparent, in the case of all who are striving to serve God in their generation.

We may not compare ourselves to him, but it is true even of us that the Lord meets us. We are taught, every time we come to the Blessed Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood, to pray that He will cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit ; and I have no doubt that the man who yields himself to the guidance and influence of that Blessed Spirit is in the truest sense inspired. And since "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh," the subject of this inspiration will have a word put in his mouth. It may not be a word of poetry or of eloquence, it may not be one to stir the soul or fire the imagination of the hearer ; but if it is a word of love for God, a word which really seeks to do Him service, it will never be spoken in vain. We read only the other day of a little one whom the Lord met in the silent

watches of the night. He was at first startled and perplexed—that voice, the voice of God, was so different from other sounds, that he almost failed to perceive its meaning ; but God was very tender and very gentle in His dealings with him, He led him forward step by step, and by-and-by “all Israel knew” that that child, Samuel, “was established to be a prophet of the Lord.” And note what was his preparation—what were the conditions under which God met him.

He had first the innocent heart of a child : living amid scenes of lust and debauchery, he preserved that pearl of great price, the innocence of childhood.

And then he possessed the self-control of a Nazarite. He had been vowed to God even from his mother’s womb, and no taste of those seductive foes, which raise the flesh in rebellion against the soul, had ever touched his lips.

And thirdly, he dwelt in a holy atmosphere of prayer. The little Levite of the sanctuary has become to us all the type of the praying boy, as we see him kneeling on his pallet bed, in the evening silence of the tabernacle at Shiloh.

“Oh for that innocent heart, oh for that self-

control, oh for those sweet surroundings!" we say ; and we sigh as we think how we have injured the one, and lost the other, and become strangers to the third. It may be so, dear brethren ; there may, indeed, be cause for grief, when we think of the countless times in which God has met us, and was willing to put a word in our mouth, and we have turned a deaf or inattentive ear. Cause for grief, yes, but no cause for despair. God is very patient and long-suffering. How He bore with Balaam ! what chances He gave him—even forcing him to speak words of truth against his will ! He has not yet rejected us. And though we cannot offer Him the heart of perfect innocence, nor the ear entirely unsullied by the world, yet if we go to Him, not in the spirit of a Balaam, obstinate and argumentative, but of a Samuel, child-like and obedient, He will certainly meet us, and will respond to the simple faith which prays, " Speak, Lord ; for Thy servant heareth."

    "Sceptre and Star divine,  
    Who in Thine inmost shrine  
Hast made us worshippers, O claim Thine own ;  
    More than Thy seers we know—  
    O teach our love to grow  
Up to Thy heavenly light, and reap what Thou hast sown."

## VII.

*April 29, 1900.*

### SHAKESPEARE, THE MAN AND THE POET.

BY THE VERY REV. F. W. FARRAR, DEAN OF  
CANTERBURY.

"Their bodies are buried in peace ; but their name liveth for evermore. The people will tell of their wisdom, and the congregation will show forth their praise."—ECCLUS. xlv. 14.

THIS Sunday is set apart in Stratford-on-Avon to commemorate the greatest of English poets, and to thank God for so rich a boon to us and to the human race. I will, without any conventional methods of approach, at once deal with the subject before us.

An American writer has made the striking remark that, of all great personalities, Shakespeare is at once the least known to us, and the best known. He is the least known to us in his ordinary biography ; the best known in those

mighty plays which have taught us how glorious and many-sided a thing is human life, and how the wings of the mind were not meant to be demurely folded for conventionalists to suppress their flight.

I. Of Shakespeare the man what shall we say? We might apply to him his own words, "The secretest of natures have not more gift in taciturnity." The externals of his biography are frankly commonplace. At twenty-three he found himself the eldest of five children of a ruined country tradesman, not very happily married to a woman of thirty, with three children and no means of support. He died at fifty-two, and, after a successful career as an actor and dramatist, had secured the position of a country gentleman. The anecdotes about him are mostly a negligible quantity, made up of untrustworthy, and often malicious, tittle-tattle. The popular conceptions of him are diametrically diverse. Some represent him as simply a shrewd, well-to-do man of the world; others, as the victim of drink and wild emotions. Both conceptions are deplorably false. They only show that he never meant "to wear his heart upon his sleeve for daws to peck at." He has been compared to an Alpine summit, towering far above

the other hills ; and "one of the penalties of altitude is isolation." He gave to the world all that was best, richest, most immortal in his endowments ; but disdained to chronicle the petty details of commonplace. All the insight we shall ever gain into Shakespeare as a man must be derived from his own works. Otherwise, as has been truly said, we shall beat our wings in vain against the barriers of his impenetrable reserve.

II. His unique supremacy was the result of triple elements. It was due, in part, to his personal endowments ; in part to the impulse of his times ; in part to the experiences of his life.

I. As regards his personal endowments, his was a nature intense and complex. There were in him the elements of that speculative hesitation and wistful curiosity which he depicts in *Hamlet* ; of the absorbing love which he portrays in *Romeo* ; and the tendency to dark and bitter views of life which he sets forth in *Timon* and *Measure for Measure* :—but he, like his favourite hero, King Henry V., won the great battle of his life, and became *Victor hostium et sui*—master of *himself* as well as of his enemies. He would have said with Fletcher—

“Man is his own star, and the soul that can  
Render an honest and a perfect man  
Commands all life, all influence, all fate ;—  
Nothing to him falls early or too late :  
Our acts our angels are ; or good or ill,  
Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.”

In speaking of his intellectual gifts, the poet Gray was not far wrong in his famous lines—

“In thy green lap was Nature’s darling laid,  
What time, where lucid Avon strayed,  
To him the mighty mother did unveil  
Her awful face. The dauntless child  
Stretch’d forth his little arms and smiled.  
‘This pencil take,’ she said, ‘whose colours clear,  
Richly paint the vernal year.  
Thine too these golden keys, immortal boy !  
This can unlock the gates of joy,  
Of sorrow that, and thrilling fears,  
Or ope the sacred source of sympathetic tears.’ ”

Only we must bear in mind that these immense endowments were not the gift of a moment, but were the gradual acquisition of a strenuous life.

2. Secondly, as regards the impulse of his times, Shakespeare was a child of the Renaissance. He had experienced to the full the electric thrill of that marvellous epoch of power, of passion, of awakening, of rekindled genius, when, shaking off the effete tyrannies of superstition, Europe sprang into intellectual manhood ; Greece “rose from the dead, with the New Testament in her hand ;” and “the Reformation,” as Coleridge says,

“sounded through Europe like the blast of an archangel’s trumpet.” He was, as Ben Jonson called him, “the soul of his age,” and this alone would have made him “the star of poets.”

He had the largeness, the tragic intensity, the vivid sense of humour, the deep insight alike into the tragedy and comedy, the glory and degradation, of human life, which marked his epoch ; but, further than this, “he was not for an age, but for all time.” His “omnipresent creativeness” was God’s gift to him, and to it was due the complexity of his force.

3. But the third constituent element in Shakespeare’s greatness is traceable in large measure to the bitter experiences of his life. God overruled his moral swervings, and made the injuries which, in great measure, he had brought upon himself, his schoolmasters.

So far as we can get any real light on the soul of Shakespeare, we must find it in the Sonnets. They undoubtedly express some of his most uncontrolled and overwhelming personal emotions. In them we see how keenly he felt the moral and social drawbacks of his position, and its evil influence on his character. He says—

“ When in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,  
I, all alone, bewEEP my outcast state,  
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
And look upon myself, and curse my fate.”

He describes himself as—

“ Made lame by fortune’s dearest spite.”

He laments that he has—

“ Made himself a Motley to the view ;”

and craves pity because Fortune is—

“ The guilty goddess of my harmful deeds,  
That did not better for my life provide  
Than public means which public manners breeds.  
Thence comes it that my name receives a brand,  
And almost thence my nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer’s hand.”

It is evident that these bitter experiences had sunk very deeply into his soul. But the Sonnets also show the intensity of passionate devotion of which he was capable, and how that devotion was fatally dashed to the ground alike by the falsity of shallow friendship, and by the gross infidelity of hollow and sensual love. We hear the cry of this agony in Othello’s words—

“ But there, where I had garner’d up my heart,  
Where I must either live or have no life—  
Patience, thou young and rose-tipped cherubim,  
Aye ! there look grim as hell.”

It was this terrible trial to his deepest affections which gives to the Sonnets that profound sense of the irony of fate, and the helplessness of human beings in the midst of their crushing environment. These feelings for a time made Shakespeare utterly weary of his life as he sighed—

“Tired of all these, for restful death I cry,”  
and—

“We are such stuff  
As dreams are made of, and our little life  
Is rounded by a sleep.”

In the series of his later plays we may trace his emancipation from the tyrannous witchery of lurid shadows, and the heroic grasp which he finally attained over the most eternal elements of human nobleness. Through bitter experiences, and a fall from the high purity of self-control, he was taught to

“ . . . see the things  
That are, and to see them as they are.”

The Shakespeare of the light, airy comedy of *Love's Labour's Lost*, and the boisterous farce of the *Comedy of Errors*, and the winning playfulness of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, became, under the stress and strain of outraged affections, the Shakespeare of *Hamlet*, of *Timon*, and of *King*

*Lear* ; until gradually, by God's grace, he was enabled to secure over himself that serene and tranquil empire which shines through *The Tempest*, and that humble faith which is expressed in the prologue of his last will. Disillusioned of the sorcery of sin, at last he had learnt in the light of God to understand the true, deep, eternal meaning of human life, and that

“ 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.”

III. Once, when a play of Terence was being acted before the vast multitude which thronged the theatre of ancient Rome, on hearing the line—

“Homo sum : humani nihil a me alienum puto”—

“I am a human being : nothing human is without its interest for me”—the whole assemblage sprang to its feet, and broke into tumults of applause. The line might stand for an epitome of Shakespeare's plays. In order to draw living pictures, in order “to hold as it were a mirror up to nature,” he had to see life as a whole ; and he found something interesting and almost lovable in all human beings, even when they fell deplorably short of every noble ideal. As one who well knew the complexity and weaknesses of human nature, he

looked at men with curiosity and deep sympathy. Yet this pity did not blind him to unchangeable realities ; and if his dramatic genius and that which was the *vitium temporis* more than the *vitium hominis*, prevented him from totally excluding from his plays the element of coarseness, yet his moral judgment was never misled. He has to represent low characters, and to echo coarse talk, but never, under any circumstances, does he sink so low as to

“Paint the gates of hell with Paradise ;”

or to imitate the flagrant immoralities of contemporary dramatists, who

“ . . . stood around  
The throne of Shakespeare, sturdy but unclean.”

He feels evident intellectual delight in setting before us a living picture of the debauched, witty and utterly worthless “Falstaff ;” yet the deliberate verdict of his moral sense as to such a character is uttered in the thunder-crash of reproof with which the depraved sensualist is dismissed by the young king after his conversion—

“I know thee not, old man : fall to thy prayers.  
How ill white hairs become a fool and jester !  
I oft have dream'd of such a kind of man,  
So surfeit-swoll'n, so old, and so profane,  
But, being awake, I do despise my dream.”

Without sinking for a moment into religious artificiality, or losing sight of the sacredness of facts, Shakespeare became a moral teacher for all time. From the whole range of English literature you could gather no nobler or truer exhortations to chastity than you will find in Shakespeare ; no deeper warnings against greed, envy, and worldly ambition ; no more powerful sermon to the whole English people against the degradation and ruin of drunkenness. The greatest and holiest souls have seen this. Milton was a stern Puritan, of seraphic genius, yet he wrote—

“ Dear son of memory, dear heir of fame, . . .  
Thou in our wonder and astonishment  
Hast built thyself a living monument,  
And there sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,  
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.”

Wordsworth was a saintly Anglican, yet he wrote—

“ We must be free or die who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spoke.”

“ He favoured virtue from his very soul,” said John Keble, “ and led the way to sounder views even upon sacred things.” “ His plays,” said Dean Milman, “ are instinct with the religious life of

Christianity." "His mind was saturated with the Bible," said Bishop Charles Wordsworth.

Strict Evangelical divines have ungrudgingly borne the same testimony. "Next to the Bible," said Dean McNeile, "I have derived more benefit from Shakespeare than any human author." The range of such testimonies is endless, and Tennyson accounts for them when he writes—

"The Poet in a golden clime was born  
With golden stars above,  
Dower'd with the hate of hate, the scorn of scorn,  
The love of love.  
He saw thro' life and death, thro' good and ill ;  
He saw through his own soul ;  
The marvel of the universal will  
An open scroll  
Before him lay."

IV. I will now dwell as briefly as I possibly can, on two only of the immense benefits which we may gain from the study of his works. One of these is the thrilling finality with which he expresses many a holy and powerful lesson in isolated passages ; the other is the deeper and more solemn insight into the meaning of life which he concentrates into many plays.

1. First, then, let us glance, by way of specimen, at a very few only of Shakespeare's immortal

presentations of isolated moral and spiritual truths, clothed in language which can never be forgotten. Has any man suffered from slander? Let him take this comfort—

“If powers divine  
Behold our human actions, as they do,  
I doubt not then that Innocence shall make  
False accusation blush.”

Does any man secretly flatter himself that vice can elude punishment? Let him learn that—

“The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices  
Make instruments to scourge us.”

Would we be comforted if, sometimes, in spite of ourselves, we seem to be tormented by evil suggestions? Well, as Christian might have learnt when, in the Valley of the Shadow of Death, an unseen evil spirit whispered into his ears blasphemies which he feared might be his own—

“’Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,  
Another thing to fall.”

Do we desire to have impressed upon our hearts the truth that self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control, are the secret of all nobleness? Let us ponder the rule—

“To thine own self be true,  
And it shall follow as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Would we learn the wretchedness of inconsistency?

“How sour sweet music is  
When time is broke, and no proportion kept !  
So is it with the music of men’s lives.”

Would we be warned against the impossible wickedness of bargaining with God for any sinful reservations, and learn that remorse differs utterly from repentance, and that sin must be forsaken before it can be forgiven? Hear how the bad, adulterous king, unable to pray, finds that he cannot be pardoned and retain the offence, and rises from his knees with the despairing confession—

“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below :  
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.”

The pages of Shakespeare are sown thick with such orient pearls ; and thus he helps us to realize the awful reality and solemnity of life, and that—

“What is man,  
If the chief use and market of his time  
Be but to sleep and feed ? A beast ; no more.”

2. But it is naturally from the study of Shakespeare’s plays *as a whole* that we learn the lessons

of the meaning of life by contemplating it, not in sudden revealing flashes, but in its awfulness and complexity, yet lighted as from within by the light of eternity. Something of this we see even in his historic plays. Sir W. Raleigh, in the preface to his *History of the World*, vindicates the glory of faithfulness, and the Nemesis upon evil-doing in the lives of our English kings. But how far more clearly is the natural outcome of men's deeds illustrated by Shakespeare, in what befell King John, the wicked and hypocritic dastard ; and Richard II., the fantastic dreamer ; and Richard III., the reckless villain ; and Henry VI., the weak saint ; and Henry V., the resolute and practised well-doer ! He shows us in nearly every play how—

“ The pie-bald miscellany, man,  
Bursts of great heart, or slips in sensual mire ; ”

and how often he—

“ Most ignorant of what he's most assured,  
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven,  
As makes the angels weep ; who, with our spleens,  
Would all themselves laugh mortal.”

3. But it is in five of his later plays that, with no miserable conventions, no namby-pamby make-believes, he portrays our nature alike in its

greatness and in its littleness. In those plays especially, the reader, as Goethe says, "seems to have before him the Book of Fate, against which is beating the tempest of eager life, so as to drive the leaves backwards and forwards with violence." It would take me too long to speak of Hamlet, with his irresolute introspectiveness and his brooding sense of the unfathomable mysteries of life ; and of the fine curses of Timon—

" With his noble heart,  
Which strongly loathing, greatly broke."

But let us cast a very swift passing glance only at three of the other plays.

(i.) In *Othello* Shakespeare has given us the only picture he has drawn of an absolutely unmitigated and full-blown villain. Iago is a cold-blooded sensual egotist, who disbelieves wholly in goodness. He is the worst specimen of those "men-slugs and human serpentry" who feed on dust, and, by the potent alchemy of their own baseness, transmute it into venom. All our sympathy and love are for the victims whom he has done to death ; all our abhorrence is for the clever, atrocious, successful reprobate. Thus, as always in Shakespeare's plays, the inherent majesty of goodness asserts itself as

the one supreme thing to be sought after, even amid the deadly triumphs of scheming wickedness.

(ii.) Again, *Macbeth* is the tragedy of sin its own avenger. It sets before us, in awful illumination, the horrors of a guilty conscience, scourging the offenders with whips and scorpions, and making them, by inevitable laws, their own executioners. It shows us that, though "the meridian of evil" is often left unvexed, yet "when the pleasure has been tasted, and is gone, and nothing left of the crime but the ruin it has wrought, then the Furies take their seats upon the midnight pillow." But *Macbeth* is also a study of temptation. It sets before us that the tempting opportunity always meets the susceptible disposition, and that when the evil thought has culminated in the evil purpose, and the evil purpose brought out the evil deed, the crime at once becomes its own pitiless avenger. Lady Macbeth scornfully exclaims, "A little water clears us of this deed," but only to find thereafter, in the horrors of dreaming sleep, that the damned spot will not out, and that "not all the perfumes of Arabia will sweeten her little hand;" just as her husband had exclaimed, in the first ghastliness of his awful crime—

“ Will all great Neptune’s ocean wash this blood  
 Clean from my hand ? Nay, this my hand will rather  
 The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
 Making the green one red.”

Thus *Macbeth* exhibits that frightful page in the book of human destinies, of which the headline is “Desires accomplished.” “Had I but died an hour before this chance,” he cries, “I had lived a blessed time !” But the deed has been done, and the haggard, miserable criminal, utterly sick of his crowned misery, is forced day by day to realize that—

“ Even-handed Justice  
 Commends the ingredients of the poisoned chalice  
 To our own lips.”

(iii.) Lastly, glance with me, for one moment, at the stupendous play of *King Lear*. That tragedy of tragedies, those scenes of mirk and tempest, of earthquake and eclipse, show us the catastrophe and conflagration of every element of human happiness. This complicated entanglement of human woe has no hope to enlighten it, for the sufferers are Pagans, to whom it seems that—

“ As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods,  
 They kill us for their sport.”

There lies Cordelia, strangled on the bosom of her

father, and the poor, wan, hunted, discrowned king tears his thin white locks, and sobs over her murdered corpse in vain, and, after hurricanes of calamity, awakes to find too late the priceless treasure which he has flung away. Shakespeare has no little platitudes to offer us ; nor will he weaken the intense force of the lesson that, even if life were but—

“ A tale, told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing,”

right still differs from wrong, not by mere preferability, but by heaven-high and immeasurable distance ; faith and goodness still burn through the midnight and triumph over it ; and, when the true and the noble seem to be most hopelessly overwhelmed under the wild hurricanes of calamity, he makes us feel that “ over such sacrifices the gods themselves throw incense.” Even were there nothing beyond, we would still rather be Cordelia strangled in prison than enjoy the “ raving egoism ” of Goneril and Regan, arrayed in their adulterous purple ; just as we would rather lie dead like sweet, murdered Desdemona, or self-stabbed with rash but honest Othello, than triumph with the thrice-execrable Iago ; and rather lie murdered

at midnight like gracious Duncan, his white hair dabbled with his gore, than be his haggard and haunted murderer. But how infinitely more is this the case, when, however much we may be stretched "on the rack of this tough world," we know assuredly that "the eternal God is our Refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms"! Shakespeare himself went through sad experiences of sin and sorrow and suffering; but we have every reason to be sure that he rose out of these tempestuous temptations and the retribution they brought; that he learnt to see the transcendent supremacy of innocence and holiness; and that at last he would have subscribed, with his whole heart, to those strong words of Robert Browning, the poet of our own day who was most akin to him in his varied and powerful genius, that—

"The acknowledgment of God in Christ,  
Accepted by the reason, solves for thee  
All problems in the world and out of it,  
And has, so far, advanced thee to be wise."

## VIII.

*April 29, 1900.*

### POET AND HISTORIAN.

BY THE REV. GEORGE ARBUTHNOT, M.A.

“And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”—REV. xv. 3.

IT was the Easter song of heaven which St. John heard. It was sung by those who stood on the shore of the sea of glass, who had gotten the victory over the beast, and who had in their hands the harps of God. Some day—if by God’s mercy we get the victory over sin and Satan, and over death—some day we may join in it. Meanwhile let us try to learn something, when our minds are full of thoughts of our own great poet—let us try to learn something of that Moses, the servant of God, who composed the song.

Moses—we know him as a lawgiver, as an historian. He was also a poet, and it is of Moses the

poet that we speak now. There are quotations from three of his poems in the chapter we have read as the First Lesson to-night—the twenty-first chapter of Numbers. They are brief and fragmentary, in one case being a reference rather than a quotation ; but such as they are, they are fine specimens of Hebrew poetry.

The first is in the fourteenth and fifteenth verses : “Wherefore it is said in the book of the wars of the Lord, What He did in the Red Sea, and in the brooks of Arnon, and at the stream of the brooks that goeth down to the dwelling of Ar, and lieth upon the border of Moab.”

From this we learn that there was a book—known as the Book of the Wars of the Lord—a book of poems, doubtless by Moses, which has been lost, that amongst other contents there was an ode which we may call a song of battle, recounting the successes of Israel from the passage of the Red Sea down to their arrival at the margin of the kingdom of Moab, by the river Arnon, which is the principal stream flowing into the Dead Sea. I see no reason why we should not regard the song in the fifteenth chapter of Exodus as coming from the same source : “Then sang Moses and the children of

Israel this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath He thrown into the sea." Nor the reply of Miriam, when the Hebrew maidens went out after her with timbrels and dances, in the same refrain, "Sing ye to the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously."

The next quotation is in ver. 17, and refers to an incident of the wilderness-journey. It is not a song of battle, but a song of labour—of successful labour to supply temporal wants. On more than one occasion we read of the thirst of the Israelites as they marched towards Canaan, and the way in which God gave them water. Twice at least, possibly much oftener, it was by Moses' striking the rock that "the water gushed out, and the streams flowed withal." But this time God dealt differently: "Gather the people together," He said to Moses, "and I will give them water;" and then He showed them where to dig, and the leaders digged and found water, and the well became famous, and was known as the well of the heroes. Beer-elim was its name, and we hear of it in the prophecies of Isaiah: "The cry has gone round about the borders of Moab, and the howling thereof unto Beer-elim."

The event was such an important one that a song was composed in honour of it, and the people chanted, "Spring up, O well ; sing ye unto it. The princes digged the well, the nobles of the people digged it, by the direction of the lawgiver, with their staves."

What a pretty little picture of national life in the wilderness this gives us ! We see the chief men out of every tribe taking turns as they dug ; and we can fancy the eagerness with which the people watched as they went deeper and deeper, until at last they came to water. And there seems no reason why we should not believe that similar songs were sung when Moses smote the rock, and water gushed out, or when he prayed to the Lord, and the manna came down. These were incidents of vast import to the nation, and would be justly celebrated in verse, though the poems then composed have been lost. We are thankful that this little one has been preserved, and we are not surprised at the conjecture that it became the water-drawing song of Israelitish maidens. Then, as now, it was the women who went to the well to bring the supply of water for the family on their heads. Some have held that the Blessed Virgin was saluted by the angel Gabriel as she went to the well of

Nazareth to draw water. The woman of Samaria met the Messiah as she was on a similar errand. So the custom has been handed down, and we can think of the young girls as they went singing this song about their forefathers' blessings: "Spring up, O well; sing ye unto it," and filling their water-pots with a supply for the wants of the home.

The third quotation is more warlike, and may well come from the Book of the Wars of the Lord. It is in the twenty-seventh and three following verses: "They that speak in proverbs [or, 'draw comparisons;'] it is almost equivalent to 'the poets'], they say, Come into Heshbon, let the city of Sihon be built and prepared: for there is a fire gone out of Heshbon, a flame from the city of Sihon: it hath consumed Ar of Moab, and the lords of Arnon's high places." The poet puts these words into the mouth of the Amorites who had conquered Moab. Then he joins with them, and continues—

"Woe unto thee, Moab! thou art undone,  
O people of Chemosh the sun-god.  
He hath given his sons that escaped  
And his daughters into captivity  
Unto Sihon King of the Amorites."

Then a change comes over the spirit of the

poem. The boastings of the Amorites fade away, and it is the Hebrews who sing—

“We have shot at them : Heshbon is perished even unto Dibon,  
And we have laid them waste even unto Nophah,  
Which reacheth unto Medeba.”

This was the song of victory, and the next verse tells the result : “Israel dwelt in the land of the Amorites.” Thus history and poetry go hand-in-hand ; nay, poetry records history, and the true poet is an historian.

I would notice one other song of this servant of God. It is that written in the thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy—the dying song of Moses. The circumstances under which it was composed are told us. The lawgiver was about to pass away. Even as he taught it to the children of Israel, he charged his successor, Joshua the son of Nun, in these words : “Be strong and of a good courage : for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I sware unto them.” And he took the book of the Law, and he put it into the ark of the covenant ; for he knew the rebellion and the stiff neck of the people, and he added, “Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and

call heaven and earth to record against them. For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you ; and evil will befall you in the latter days ; because ye will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."

And then "Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended." It would take too long to recite it all, but I must quote just three verses, which describe the care of God for His people. Even in our English translation they are beautiful : what must they have been in their Hebrew original ! "Jehovah found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness ; He led him about, He instructed him, He kept him as the apple of His eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings : so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

And thus the lawgiver reminded his people of the claims of Jehovah on their allegiance, bringing poetry to the help of reason, when he sought to

secure obedience. And when the song was ended—even the selfsame day—we are told, the order came from God, “Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho ; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession : and die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people.” And so the old man started on his last ascent, and as he passed through the camp, he still spoke in poetry—for he paused as he reached each group of tents where one tribe dwelt, and addressed words of warning or of blessing to them. It was a wonderful, a touching sight to watch him as he went. The men, their wives and their children, came out to the door of their tents, and respectfully, tearfully, bade him farewell ; and he—full of the spirit of poetry and prophecy—told them in a few words what would befall their tribe in the coming years. Thus as he stood before Judah, he exclaimed, “Hear, Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people : let his hands be sufficient for him ; and be Thou an help to him from his enemies.” And to Benjamin he said, “The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety

by Him ; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders."

And so he passed from tribe to tribe, until, as he reached the outskirts of the camp, the foot of the fatal hill, he turned, and, with hands uplifted, gave the final blessing : " The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. . . . Happy art thou, O Israel : who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the Shield of thy help, and who is the Sword of thy excellency ! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee ; and thou shalt tread upon their high places."

He spoke, and then he turned away, and was gone. They watched him with straining eye, as he climbed the hill, until his form was lost in the distance. It was a wonderful death—a departure which reminds us of one more wonderful still, when a Greater than Moses lifted up His hands and blessed His people, and was parted from them, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Such was the end of the great lawgiver and historian, whom I also claim as the first poet of Israel. It is of interest to note that the psalm which we more especially connect with death—the psalm which we chant when we bring our

venerated dead to rest—the ninetieth psalm—is expressly stated to be his composition: “Lord, Thou hast been our Refuge from one generation to another.”

Let us notice, first of all, the important part which poetry plays in the formation of national character. Somebody said—it is a trite quotation—“Let me write the songs of a people, and let who will make their laws.” And I venture to think we have an illustration of the truth of this in what is heard around us to-day. A great wave of patriotism has risen, which is sweeping over, not only this kingdom, but the British Empire. It is the wind of adversity which has raised it, but it is full of blessing in disguise ; it will fertilize the land for future crops, even as the Nile in flood. And that patriotism shows itself, and spreads and grows, by means of such songs as the National Anthem, “God save the Queen,” and “Rule, Britannia.” Of those thousands of children who have sung to Her Majesty, “God save the Queen,” and who will remember the circumstance to their dying day, I don’t suppose one quarter know that the fifth Commandment teaches them to honour and obey the Queen, and all who are put in authority under her.

And if this is the case, how important it is that the poets of a nation should be pure in heart, in conception, in diction ! We all know some of whom this cannot be said, whom I will not even name in this sacred place ; but the poet whom we claim as our own (we in Stratford) cannot come under this charge. It is true that some of his writing is not in accordance with modern ideas of expression ; that he uses words which could not now be spoken in public, and depicts scenes upon which we would not care for our wives and daughters, or even ourselves to gaze ; but though Shakespeare fell in, in this respect, with the custom of his time, there is this to be always remembered, that if he paints vice in startling colours, he never makes vice victorious ; that he holds up sin—if too prominently—at least always to opprobrium ; and that on his pages virtue always triumphs. And so, he has done much to educate and form popular opinion ; so the representation of his plays now is to be encouraged, because it sets before a public, many of whom will not listen to sermons, the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of vice. But more, like Moses he teaches history by poetry. Just as the Book of the Wars

of the Lord served to keep alive patriotism and love of country in the minds of the Israelites, so do the historical plays of Shakespeare teach us to be proud of our country, when we see it, for example, in conflict with France, or watch how with a strong arm sedition and rebellion are put down. And thirdly, just as Moses gave a song which became associated with the performance of such a quiet domestic duty as drawing water, so does Shakespeare stimulate the practice of those domestic virtues, which have made the homes of England, whether cottage or castle, the abodes of peace and happiness.

And thus, year by year, as this season comes round, we watch the apotheosis of our hero, as Israel the ascent of Moses ; we listen, like them, to the words of wisdom which he has dropt ; and we decorate his grave to show our reverence for his memory. And so, through human teaching, imperfect as it must be at the best, we are brought to that greatest of teachers, Who was at once human and Divine ; and we pass from the songs of earth to learn those of heaven. The song of Moses was one of triumph over an earthly foe, of deliverance from earthly slavery ; but the song

of the Lamb tells of something greater and more spiritual—of triumph over death, and deliverance from Satan. “Worthy is the Lamb”—these are the words—“worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.”

It is sung even now by saints who have gone before, and are standing round the glassy sea. It will be sung hereafter by redeemed creation. Let us hope and pray, and struggle and strive that we may be among those “who have gotten the victory over the beast,” and shall “stand by the sea of glass, having the harps of God.”

THE END.











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